

Fushigi Yuugi: Night Wings

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Summary: After the manga ends, things change in the Realm of the Four Gods. Includes almost everyone.

Fushigi Yuugi: Night
Wings

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= FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part One-

The wind blew through the courtyard where a blue-haired monk was sitting...stock-still, like stone, not moving a muscle at all, even when the breeze began to become fierce and started to sting. He took in a deep breath and then was frozen again, as if his particular flow of time had stopped at that exact moment, and then he let it out again, moments later. Dark clouds collected in the night sky and lightning flashed across the horizon. A red-haired figure sat inside, staring out through an open doorway at the other man, his hand propping his chin. "Chichiri...what the *(\$& are you doin'...you've been out dere for days..." he mumbled to himself and then stretched out, lying down on his back. "I'm gonna haveta go get 'im in a minute...it's gonna rain like crazy..." He laid out there for a few minutes, until at last he heard the gentle patter of raindrops against the roof, at which point he pushed himself to his feet and strolled casually outside, into the courtyard, looking around. He stopped in front of the monk. "'Chiri...you gotta come in now. You're gonna get soakin' wet out here." The monk said nothing, silent and unmoving. At last, Tasuki had enough, so he suddenly dove down, grabbed the other man's waist, and tossed him over his shoulder. Chichiri began to move at last, attempting violently to release himself. "TASUKI!!! Let me go!!!" Once the two were inside, the

Hessian did just that...tossing him onto a mat in front of the fire. The slightly damp monk sat there, silent for a minute, then he looked over at the red-haired man, who had sat down beside him. "Gets lonely around here lately, no da..." Tasuki nodded. "Yeah. What with everyone else leavin' for a while...and then Miaka and whatshisface." At the mention of the former priestess, Chichiri cringed noticeably. It was a little bit more difficult to hide his reactions without the mask that formerly did just that, and although he had gone through years of training, lately he seemed to forget much of it. The collapse of everything that he had once held dear had truly worn thin on the man's psyche. Then it was as if something strange happened...a wrinkle in the fabric of reality, or along those lines...as if something had been said or done that was not in the script of how things should be. At once, the monk leaped to his feet, tensing, and he was soon followed by the red-haired man. "What the *(@#\$ was that???" Tasuki scanned the room for any sort of intruders, finding none; he stepped outside of the room and began to make a perimeter search. Chichiri, instead, closed his eyes. Something inside him was trying to express itself, something that he had denied for quite a long time. He resigned himself and let down his inner guards, and then...

Tasuki peered around a corner, finding only dripping roof and puddles on the ground. Suddenly his ears caught the sound of a shrill scream, but a man's nonetheless. "'Chiri!!!" He bolted back to the room, where the blue-haired monk was sprawled out on the floor, clutching his chest. Tasuki knelt beside him, frantic. "'Chiri!!! Are you okay? What the *\$*# is goin' on?? Can I do somethin'???" The other man shook his head. "...nothing...just...wait..." Tasuki did not move from his position, and he looked around the room for anything to help, finding a blanket. He bunched it up and slipped it under Chichiri's head gently, then touched the other man's shoulder for support. The monk, meanwhile, was struggling inwardly, a fight that had begun to manifest itself on his physical form. His facial scar was actually...bleeding...and so was his mouth. He could taste his own blood, and that coupled with the invasion of his mind made him ill. He felt like vomiting, ridding himself somehow of the unwanted influence, but he knew that to do so would be to stop the greater benefit of the surrender, that if he betrayed himself now, it would only make things worse. At last, the pain ceased, and he stood, shakily, with the help of Tasuki, who supported his friend. Then he did something that entirely shocked both of them...and opened his left eye. Instead of a socket, there seemed to be some sort of transparent eye...not an eyeball proper, but more of a ghost of an eye instead, one with a light inside it. The scar around his eyelids still trickled out blood, although Chichiri paid it no attention. Tasuki gasped in surprise and released his friend, who staggered back, the eye flashing its gaze to Tasuki. Then the monk spoke, in a voice not entirely his own. "The stones...you must find them...the seishi...Suzaku must come. Otherwise...destruction...SUZAKU MUST COME." With that, Chichiri's eye shut itself, and the bleeding stopped, both on his face and in his mouth. He released his chest, which had stopped with its piercing agony, and looked at Tasuki with his one remaining eye. "I guess you're wondering what that was...no da...?" Tasuki nodded, his eyes still wide open from the strange occurrence. "Well...I suppose if I want your help, I'm going to have to tell you...but this doesn't go beyond us, all right? Not until we find out more about what is happening..." The redhead nodded again and sat down, Chichiri doing the same and looking over at him. "It was some years ago...before Miaka came to our world, and just after

my training...I met an older monk, that was much like me. We sat down and talked by the side of the road...about many things. And he told me some very...troubling things, as well, that at the time I did not believe." He cleared his throat and scratched his ear idly, then continued. "One of those related to you, of course...some others about the other seishi, and more than a few that told me some things about the nature of our priestess." Tasuki held up a hand and finally spoke. "But wait... if ya knew alla these things beforehand, why didn't ya just use it to win alla time? Why'd we haveta go through all we did if you knew what was gonna happen?" The monk shook his head. "I didn't. Not everything, anyway. The way the monk said it was in poetic language, and I didn't realize most of it until it had already happened, and it was too late by then. I wish...I could've prevented most of the things that happened. If only I had really allowed myself to." He sighed heavily. "If I had let my guard down, even for a moment, always thought that I would lose myself. But I waited so long that it's become more of a possession, of my own hidden self trying to take me over..." Noticing Tasuki's blank stare, he sweatdropped and continued with the story. "Anyway, the monk disappeared when I was distracted by a sound from the clearing nearby, and so I thought he had gone there. I rushed over, and in that clearing were several crystals, all rotating in the air, glowing in a sort of web. And now that I remember, they all had the signs of the seishi...some signs were on more than one crystal...and I didn't understand, so I locked the memory away...I thought it might have been a dream, because the next thing I remembered was waking up a distance back on the road, before I had ever met the other monk." The redhead leaned forward expectantly. "So what's goin' on?" "There's something else to this story. It's not over yet. Remember what Miaka was saying about how things are? I don't think she was completely correct. Everything hasn't ended yet. She may be out of the story, so to speak, but the story still continues...do you understand?" The other man nodded slightly, and Chichiri continued. "I think...that there is something we must do. If you will help me..." Tasuki nodded. "Yeah. What is it?" "Those crystals...we have to find them." The other man blinked and glared at Chichiri. "Do you know how big this **\$(#in' place is??? And we're s'posed ta look for some *CRYSTALS*???" Chichiri sighed. "Well, I do have a way of finding them, no da." "Oh...okay then." Tasuki sat back and looked over at him, settling down a bit. The monk fished around a bit in his kasa, producing a long necklace with a brilliant sapphire in the middle, clear as an ocean's waters on a moonlit night. He handed it to Tasuki. "I can't wear this, no da. It has to be someone else to help me find it. You have to wear this, okay no da?" Tasuki nodded slightly and fastened it around his neck, grinning. If nothing else, it was a very nice necklace, and he always had an eye for valuable things. He gave the nod to Chichiri and stood. The monk crossed over to the small table near the door and set down his own necklace, looking back at Tasuki. "In case anyone comes back, they'll know we'll be back soon, no da. Are you ready, no da?" The other man tied his tessen to his belt and nodded, following closely. "Hey, 'Chiri, what'd that other monk look like?" They walked through the courtyard and out of the area, into an open field. Chichiri was silent until they reached a river, at which point he removed his hat and tossed it into the air...then they both found themselves on the other side of the river, and the monk spoke as they made their way into the forest. "I never saw his face...but his voice was familiar."

Somewhere, some distance away, a hooded figure peered into a small sphere in its hand. A feminine voice spoke, seemingly to nothing. "I

see...the crystals. I understand." The wind whipped up, and with a flurry of leaves and raindrops across the hill upon which the figure was standing, it vanished, leaving only the small sphere to roll down the hill, towards the forest...

Chichiri and Tasuki pushed through the underbrush, both glad to be out of the downpour. The forest canopy was at least taking off the strongest of the rain, and only small droplets were cascading down from higher limbs. Tasuki of course grumbled intermittently, cursing as his hair began to allow liquid to trickle down his neck and face. Chichiri just chuckled to himself, warm and dry wearing his large angled hat. Somewhere, wood snapped, and Chichiri froze, but Tasuki was quicker to action; he tackled his ally out of the way, and just in time, as it turned out the broken piece in question was a large branch of the tree overhead...but at that size, it could have easily been the top end of any regular tree. Tasuki produced his metal fan and stood at the ready, while Chichiri scanned the area for any sort of challenger. "That sorta thing don't happen naturally." The bandit gritted his teeth. "Damn rain..." He wiped his slicked bangs out of his face and back on his head. Chichiri released an energy blast into the darkness of the trees, and the sound of a body leaping in the wind could be heard...and then, at once, Tasuki was slammed into the trunk of a tree behind the monk, who spun around instantly, his staff now at the ready for close combat with the intruder. "Show yourself!!!" There was a chilling silence for a moment, and the blue-haired man knelt over Tasuki, helping him to his feet. The two stood, back-to-back, looking out around them into the forest for any sign of movement. At last, that sign did come, from Chichiri's direction. He nudged Tasuki, who stood beside him, to face the oncoming threat. They both stayed their ground, sentinel-like, each grasping his weapon tightly, with a grip that would not release easily. The figure, hooded in black silk, emerged from the trunks surrounding it, and it bent down and picked up the small, shiny sphere, then stowed it somewhere in the cloak. Two delicate hands emerged from the darkness in which the body was shrouded and pulled back the hood of the cloak...and eyes the shade of willow bark stared out at them...followed by a face that a statue would be grateful to have...and long, flowing violet locks, with the bangs hanging in this figure's face, and the bulk of the hair braided, draped over its thin shoulder. Tasuki's jaw dropped, and he was speechless, but his partner stepped forward, cautiously. He looked on one side, and then the other, then, puzzled, stepped back. "You are not this person, no da. Why do you take his form?" The figure gestured towards itself in a flamboyant way. "Look, yours isn't to ask questions, okay? All you're supposed to do is defeat me, so that you can get this first crystal and then get under way to finding the others, that's all I know right now." It put a hand on its hip and then flitted the other hand around. "Now I supposed I *COULD* be hard on you and put up the fight of my life, but then...I *AM* dead, after all..." Tasuki growled, slashing through the air, his voice full of anger. "You're nothin' like the guy you look like!! LEKKA SHIEN!!!" It nimbly dodged the arrows of flame that shot through the air, and then it landed a massive punch in Tasuki's stomach, appearing by the Hessian to elbow the back of his neck, sending him out of the fight and to the ground at once. Chichiri closed his eyes and clasped his hands together, then released a huge ball of energy at the figure, who leaped out of the way and brought a its joined fists down on the monk's back, sending the monk, too, to his knees. But he would not be beaten; he swung his staff around and knocked the cloaked stranger to the ground, then was upon it in the blink of an eye. He placed two

fingers to its neck, glaring down at it. "You have lost. Surrender the crystal, or pay the penalty for your attack." The figure smirked. "Well, if I absolutely must." It tossed something at the heap that was Tasuki, hitting him on the head, which produced a moan from the already-suffering Hessian. "Thanks for the fight." With that, Chichiri found himself astride absolutely nothing more than a cloak, and he took the thing and went over to Tasuki. "Are you all right, no da?" The redhead groaned and sat up shakily. "Whatever... that thing was...it sure packed a \$*(in' punch..." He rubbed his head and looked down at the crystal. "Hey, izzat one o' your crystals?" Chichiri nodded and picked it up. "It is...and I think that I am beginning to understand..."

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Two-

Tasuki sat, staring at the crystal, while Chichiri meditated, a glow surrounding him and it. The Hessian scratched his head, more than slightly puzzled, and simply watched in awe and interest while his friend only moved occasionally, to trace some arcane symbol in the very air before him. At once, the crystal began to float before the monk, and a second later, it cracked...bearing a symbol upon it that was not present before. "Willow...but..." Tasuki gasped, surprised and shocked. "I know that wasn't him...it couldn't'a been." "I'm beginning to understand..." Chichiri stared at the glowing crystal. "I think I know why there were many crystals with the same symbol on them...this one is for Nuriko's power...and now we have to find the one with his spirit...and the final one with his form in it." At last, he stopped his concentration and stood, placing the crystal in a small chest against the wall after wrapping it in the black silk cloak. "We were on our way to one of them when we ran into the manifestation of his power...and that was power with very little of his spirit...his self...in it, so it showed us little mercy." "Had enough o'his form, tho..." Tasuki rubbed his head, a bit irritably. Chichiri chuckled. "Well, for its purpose." He locked the chest and put the key away in his kasa, looking to the door. "Are you ready to find the next crystal, or would you prefer to wait, no da?" "I'm not *\$(#in' waitin'! I wanna get 'em now!!!" The fire-haired man tied his tessen on and rushed to join the monk, who was already halfway across the courtyard.

Sable hairs dangled in front of piercing emerald eyes as a gloved hand picked up the sparkling crystal. It began to float in his hand and suddenly, the willow sign shone through it like the other. A wicked grin curled across his face...a handsome face, only slightly marred by a scar across his forehead. His hair was long, golden, and silky, but his clothing did nothing to bring out the brilliance of his hair or eyes; instead, it consisted of a uniform-like outfit in drab greys and beiges, with unexceptional cloudy white boots and similar gloves. An extremely long gold chain dangled from a thin bracelet around his right wrist, however, and it was attached to the hilt of an ornate-looking dagger which rested in a sheath attached to his belt. He chuckled to himself, quietly, as if anything louder would disturb his surroundings, and he strode confidently off, past the ruins that surrounded him. It was a subterranean temple, blasted and destroyed somehow, and had been collapsed for quite some time. His boots echoed through the domed ceiling as he walked down the totally empty entrance hall and past the font that, he could picture, was once full of pure, clean water, but which now was only home to dirt and filth, years of it. Something inside him ached to see this place in its prime, and he burned for a second...just the blink of an

eye...to visit it in the way it was. He considered altering the temple...he felt it would be so stunning, so breathtaking...but then a shard of darkness within his heart asserted itself...and his eyes faded from the bright green that they had grown to become, back to the almost-black tint that overtook him. He clenched his fist. He had a job to do. "Who the *\$*# are you???" A tough voice broke the blessed silence from across the room, nearer to the entrance of the temple, and the blond looked over, slowly, to face the threat. Tasuki and Chichiri stood, shoulder-to-shoulder, the first having drawn his weapon and readied it, the second content to stand with his staff beside him. "How...abrupt. I wasn't expecting visitors." The man ran his gloved fingers through his fine sable hair and smiled at the two. "I suppose you could call me Yogiri...although that name is no more accurate than any other. I take it you've come to try and take this crystal from me?" He produced the small stone and held it in front of them. "Damn right!!!" Tasuki leapt forth and spread his tessen, crying out, "LEKKA SHIEN!!!" A wave of fire cut through the air at the grey-garbed man, but he flipped backwards and landed on his feet; with a flick of his wrist, he was now armed and grinning evilly. "You have power, I see. That's good...I do so hate killing the defenseless." Tasuki growled, a deep, guttural sound that Chichiri was almost astonished to hear. Before his partner could do anything, however, the monk breathed out with a short battle cry and released a blast of energy from his hands at the stranger. He grasped his staff and vanished from the scene, as the blast burst through an already-collapsing pillar behind his foe, who slipped out of the way just in time. Yogiri phased into vision just behind Tasuki and prepared to plunge his dagger deep into the bandit's chest, fire in his eyes and a darkness creeping over his face... ..but it was never to be. Chichiri appeared behind him, and with a flying kick, the man was face-down on the ground, Tasuki spinning to face him. The monk glared at their new foe, and Yogiri was on his feet in an instant. "You may have won the battle, but I will win the war." He retreated, as quickly as he had appeared, and in an instant he was completely gone from view. "I hate how those guys do dat." Tasuki looked around. "Hey, we didn't get the crystal! Dammit!!!" Chichiri smiled his usual smile. "I did." He held up the second crystal in his hand, its light shining through the dim darkness of the cave, the willow sign on it making the temple seem almost lively. "He thought he was quiet...but I was even quieter, no da." Tasuki grinned widely, his fangs showing, and he peered at the treasure his friend held. "Now all we gotta do is get the last one!" The monk nodded. "Then we'll have another ally to help us gather the others, no da." He looked around. "We don't have time to wait around...get ready, no da." He tossed his hat into the air above them...and instantly, they were gone, the kasa with them.

The darkness surrounded the two like thick tar as they made their way through the grove of trees that stood between them and their destination. The moon was little help, darkened by clouds and its own phase, making travel treacherous at best; Chichiri apparently knew his way, and thankfully Tasuki had superhuman tracking skills, so that was to their favor. "Where the *\$*# is this place, anyway?" He looked ahead and saw absolutely nothing, hearing only the sound of his voice and the dead leaves under his feet. "Seems like we've been walkin' for days." Chichiri sighed and sweatdropped a bit. "Just ahead, as I remember, no da. I have to see it to be sure. Perhaps it was a mistake to travel at night, no da?" "Guess so." As they finally found themselves on the other side of the grove, they looked around...pale starlight filtered through the ominous clouds that were

gathering since the rain had subsided, lending a surreal quality to the surroundings. Before them was a tree, made of stone...a willow, and embedded in its trunk was the third and final crystal, already glowing with the symbol that was so familiar to the two men. Tasuki rushed forth to claim it, but in an instant he stopped, his eyes widening as he gasped. It was a woman, that much was clear. In the face, she somewhat resembled the man that they knew...her hair was done much the same, and her eyes sparkled with the same family color...but there was something cold in her countenance, some totally evil quality about her bearing, and Tasuki hated it from deep within himself...and he feared it. It was like a great nightmare, and it chilled him to the bone. The woman said nothing, but she quickly produced a long spike and hurled it, in a fluid motion, at Tasuki, who nimbly dodged it, producing his tessen. "Get away from the damn crystal...I'm gonna get my friend back if I haveta kill you!!!" He slashed through the air with his fan, and fire arrows shot out at the woman, who stared them down and, with the same sort of fluidity she had previously displayed, deflected each and every one back at the bandit, who was blown off his feet. Chichiri, attempting to pry the crystal free, looked over as his friend was surprised, and his heart sunk as the woman glared back at him with dead eyes. He grasped for his staff, which was leaning against the other side of the tree, but it fell just out of his fingertips' reach, and at that instant, the woman was upon him, her long fingernails slashing at his face. He elbowed her brutally and kicked her to the ground, avoiding any sort of cuts, but he was out of breath from the very nature of the creature. It was obviously nothing human. He caught his staff this time and hurled it at her, hoping to buy himself some time, and he joined his hands in front of his face, concentrating, then as he began to glow, he released a sphere of energy at her. She was first broadsided by the staff, knocking her to the ground completely, and the blast blew her back as she weakly began to rise again. At this point, she was as good as gone; Tasuki's tessen simply finished the job with a volley of fire and the words that he had cried so many times in the past. At last, the two gathered around the stone tree, and the trunk gave up its treasure into Chichiri's welcoming hands. In a rush of wind and light, however, the whole surroundings seemed to melt into nothingness, leaving the two on a bleak plain, blasted by fire from some lightning strike earlier in the day. Tasuki looked around. "Shit...what the #(@*...?" "Another phantom, I think, no da." Chichiri looked around and smiled. "But we have what we need. It's time to get back to the palace, no da!!!"

Tasuki watched again from beside the fire as his friend unlocked the chest near the wall and withdrew the two other crystals, wrapped in the black silk cloak that the first figure had worn. The monk went to the center of the room and place each carefully in the air, where it stayed, suspended, and the three were arranged in a triangular pattern. Chichiri sat behind them and began to concentrate...and the crystals and he began to glow with the same aura and intensity...pulsating like a heartbeat. The Hessian was enthralled, watching with his eyes as wide open as his mouth. He leaned forward, at what he considered a safe distance for observation, and noted every single move the monk made, noticing that the crystals were beginning to spin like a wheel, around and around, less and less triangular and more circular as their motion began to pick up speed. At last, they merged together as if they had melted from their speed. Only the symbol of the willow remained, shining brighter than anything, making everything but that symbol seem to vanish. Tasuki shielded his eyes with his hands, but even closing his eyes seemed not to stop the

all-pervading light. He took in a deep breath, hoping for it to stop soon...and it did. Chichiri stood slowly...looking towards where the crystals once had been...and Tasuki did the same. In the center of the room was a warm, pink, unmoving body, with silky violet hair, long, stretching down his back, a face that was breathtakingly beautiful, and a well-curved, toned body almost completely devoid of hair. He was quite naked, and Tasuki immediately removed his coat, draping it across the man's most private area. His eyes flickered open and, noticing where he was and what he was not wearing, he instantly gasped and covered his chest with his folded arms, staring out at Tasuki and Chichiri, both of whom were grinning wildly. That stopped in Tasuki's case when a hand made fast contact with his face. "Cut it out!!! It isn't enough to come back from the dead, but do you *HAVE* to ogle me like that?" Nuriko smirked at the redhead, who, shocked, was holding his cheek, slightly reddened from the playful slap. "And here I thought you weren't that way." Tasuki smiled a little...then frowned over at the monk on the other side of the room. "Chichiri, if you're laughin', I will beat the living \$*& outta you, you know that, don't'cha?"

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Three-

Tasuki walked down by the water, where Nuriko was combing his long hair, singing a song. The redhead sat down some distance away and watched for a while, then finally spoke up. "Hey, Nuriko, how's it goin'?" The violet-haired man started a bit, then glared back at Tasuki. "You could let me know you were coming!!!" He sighed and then went back to combing his hair, dabbling his fingers in the stream intermittently. The Hessian sat there silently again for a moment, then broke the silence once more. "I thought ya cut your hair. Thought ya weren't gonna... y'know...dress like that?" "Then you thought mistakenly." Nuriko began to style his hair up, placing the comb in front of a loose bun, with strands dangling down in his face and the rest of his long hair trailing behind him. "I've had a lot of time to think, and I've made the decision that it is really who I am." He dabbled his fingers in the water again and plastered a couple of troublesome stragglers back in the flow of his long, silky hair. "I was having some trouble deciding who I was, what I was, and who I loved, but I think I've decided that, too." "Oh really? Whozat?" Tasuki grinned, boyishly, and leaned forward. Nuriko's eyes gleamed with a playful sparkle, and he crawled towards Tasuki a little bit, winking at him and caressing his cheek. "Why...it's *YOU*, of course, Tasuki-sama..." He then smacked that cheek and stood, laughing. "Who d'you think?" Tasuki looked hurt, but he stood and stuck his lip out, frowning. "If you weren't my friend I'd...!" "You'd what?" Nuriko put his hands on his hips and grinned, obviously amused by the whole situation. "You know I can overpower you in a second." The redhead sweatdropped and rubbed the back of his head. "Ouch..." Chichiri's voice came from out of sight, but he quickly appeared from the forest, smiling as usual. He held up another crystal in his hand, and he approached the group quickly, running instead of his usual mysterious teleportation. Nuriko put a hand on Tasuki's shoulder and kissed his cheek gently, winking at him. "We'll continue this later, okay?" He chuckled at Tasuki's blush and speechlessness, then hurried over to where Chichiri was standing. The monk held up the crystal in his hand, the sapphire tones sparkling in the bright sunlight. "I think it's Mitsukake's crystal, no da!" "That's wonderful!" Nuriko clapped jubilantly and peered at the the treasure in Chichiri's hand, while Tasuki looked from behind him. "So, that's one for Mitsukake and one for Hotohori so far...?" The monk nodded. "Yes. Now we've got

one for each of them...but finding the other two for them isn't going to be easy, no da. I've been doing some research, and I've found that it might be easier if we were to split up, no da." "Split up?" Tasuki blinked. "There's three of us. That means one of us's goin' it alone." Chichiri nodded again. "Yes, and that will be me, no da. I know specifically about the crystals, no da." "But I've got this necklace!" Tasuki pointed to the jewelry around his neck. "Not that it's done nothin'." He grumbled and held it up to examine it. "Well, er, I think that'll help you and Nuriko to find the next few crystals, no da. I've found that I don't need the necklace myself to find them, no da." The monk looked around and handed the crystal to Nuriko, who took it in gentle, delicate hands. "I have to go now...be careful, and be sure to be back in two days, no da!" With that, he vanished into his hat, which also went the way of its wearer and disappeared into the air. Nuriko nodded and tightened his grip around the crystal, firmly resolved to do what he had been instructed.

"So which crystals're we goin' after?" Tasuki sat on the floor in his usual spot, balancing his tessens on one finger. "We got four ta choose from." "Hotohori's. I've got some questions I want to ask him." Nuriko pulled on his scarlet overcoat and clasped his bracelets onto his wrists. The bandit's mind went back, and the question on his mind leapt out from his mouth. "Are ya sure that's a good idea?" "It's something I have to do." Nuriko was somewhat hurt and very anxious, Tasuki could tell, but to anyone who did not know him, he was hiding it very well. "I know what you're thinking, but I can't keep avoiding it forever." He smiled, at last. "It's okay. I know Chichiri knows as well. Are you ready to go?" The Hessian nodded and got to his feet, tying his fan onto the belt around his waist. The two made their way out of the palace and onto the path toward the mountains, chatting amongst themselves on the way.

Emerald eyes flickered in the dim light, staring into a still pool with a mirror surface. The figures moved into the distance until they were no longer discernible by gazing into the scene, and a gloved hand flicked it, disrupting the surface. Yogiri smiled into the chaotic, rippling reflection and chuckled lightly. "So that is where they are headed. I see." He flicked his wrist, and instantly his dagger was in his hand; he licked the blade, grinning widely. "They are nothing to me. It's the monk I have to be concerned with...and where has he gone...?" Another scene rippled into view, but it was foggy and obscured most of the surroundings. Not even a single figure could be seen from one side to the other, and Yogiri's brow creased with a frown. "This is useless. The one most formidable foe and I cannot see him?" He backhanded the font, and it exploded, water splashing out onto the floor. "Useless trinket." As he walked away, an impossibly happy face appeared in the many puddles left by the destruction of the gazing pool, smiling in a cheerful manner.

The monk sat by the side of the road, resting for a moment, while the wind blew the clouds around in the sky nearby. The mountains were steep, but he knew his way around from his many wanderings up and down the peaks through the years, and he knew that Nuriko and Tasuki could also make their way among the network of caves that dotted the range. He hoped inwardly that nothing would happen to them at all while they searched, but he knew better; he could feel the eyes of the new foe on the back of his neck, and even though they had faded, he knew they were there, somewhere, in the darkness that hid Yogiri's stronghold. He rose from his sitting place and put his kasa back on, clasping his staff tightly and looking up at the sky. His mask was

securely in place, and his expression was almost unchanging as he made his way along the road, farther and farther up the mountain, eyes gazing far across to the other peaks, knowing that his fellow seishi must be inside one of them. He pressed onward, passing a grove of trees jutting out of the mountainside and then a sheer cliff, and once again open, wide road. Chichiri's mind wandered as he walked along, remembering Miaka and Tamahome, his friends, who had gone forever for some reason, but it would not remain in his head...he could see them, but he could not touch them with his astral hands. They were just beyond reach, and he could not begin to comprehend how that could have happened. His memory was not absolute, and it was fading fast...aside from the things going on in his world...he knew that somehow he would have to find the truth for himself. His feet crunched the pebbles beneath it and he pressed on, desire burning inside him to finish up the quest that he had begun so that he could at last find out the true fate of all those he knew.

Tasuki held up the torch and looked around. "This necklace ain't even a little bright. I thought 'Chiri said it was gonna glow or somethin'." "Just give it time." Nuriko moved a few stones out of the way of a design on the walls of the cave, and he leaned forward, intrigued by their pattern. "Tasuki...bring the torch over here." He did so, and the whole picture was illuminated, of crystals and the departed spirits, the souls of those dearest to the god that they served. The two seishi stood there, absorbed by the tale that the glyphs told, scanning it expertly for any possible signs of the location of the crystals they sought, finding little to help. "Well, at least we know we're somewhere on the right track. I don't think they'd bother putting that in a tunnel that didn't have something to do with the crystals." At that, the cave began to rumble, and suddenly the torch was blown out by a wind rushing from the bowels of the mountain. Tasuki glared into the darkness, finding nothing, the other man at his side, fists clenched, prepared for a fight. A moment later, both of them were gazing in awe upon the sight before them: a phantasmal sight of their former emperor, clad only in floating, diaphanous robes that seemed to orbit an unseen aura. The two backed up slightly as he extended his hand and a huge, flaming sword appeared in it, the point razor-sharp and pointed at them directly. "I would say that the first one we found must've been his body, and not his personality. And I'd say this isn't his personality either Tasuki..." The sword crashed into the ground before them, and the two leaped to either side. Nuriko hesitated, not wanting to actually harm the man he had loved for so long, but his bandit friend had no such qualms and slashed his fan before him, crying, "LEKKA SHIEN!!!" Flame arrows sliced through the phantom, and it descended to the ground, weakened noticeably and without its sword. "Nuriko! We gotta get him now, while..." The Hessian was catapulted through the air into the wall by the savage blow that the apparition connected with his chest. He coughed slightly and moaned pathetically, leaving Nuriko to check his injuries, the man looking back at his friend's attacker. "You're not Hotohori, and to get him back, I have to defeat you now." Nuriko rolled up his sleeves. "I will do it!" He rushed forth, and the creature coiled back for another strike, but it was one that never came. Nuriko pummelled his clasped fists into its jaw, sending it sprawling, and then he hurled a jagged stone at it, dissipating it. Where it last lay, a single jewel, amber in color, hovered above the ground, spinning slowly. "We've got it! The second crystal!" He shook Tasuki, who awoke with a start and went over with him to collect it, but they were a moment too slow. Yogiri appeared from nothingness and snatched it up before they could even so much as try and, with a

laugh, he pushed past them and toward the entrance of the cave. The two seishi looked at each other and, without a word, bolted after the villain as fast as they could, knowing that he would never give up the crystal without a fight, and they needed it if they were ever to have any hope of restoring their former ally. Their object of pursuit spun to face them at the edge of the cave, laughing as his eyes lit up with a mad fury that the redhead had seen before. The man holding the crystal lifted it skyward and grinned with an evil sort of insanity and his sharp canines sparkled in the sunlight. "This is the last gesture of your former emperor, you insects. I am your ruler now, your god and master!!!" Yogiri cackled, overtaken by the power of the object that they had found, and light exploded out of the crystal and struck the mountainside...rocks began to tumble down. "Now I will have only one to deal with, and you will no longer be of any concern to me. This will be your lesson, tamper not in the domain of your betters!" As the rockslide began, the sable-haired madman was gone, with the second crystal of Hotohori firmly in his grasp. Nuriko looked at Tasuki and up at the rocks...if they were to escape before the true destruction of the avalanche, they were going to have to think of a truly brilliant plan.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Four-

Chichiri looked around at the open air surroundings of long, clear water in pools much like baths, with only birds attending to them, while all around half-ruined pillars stood, like slumped over watchers who had grown weary of their post. He stepped down the central path and looked up at the sparkling jewel set in stone and proceeded with a chant under his breath, then gestured at the jewel, which obediently floated towards his hand. The monk grasped it and then put it away in his hat, looking around again, as if to make sure that he was alone. "Mitsukake's second stone...now only one left, no da." He turned slowly and stepped carefully out of the strange and beautiful area that held the object of his quest, then began to make his way back to the bottom of the mountain. "The other crystal will be on the next peak, no da. I'll have to do my best to get done by tomorrow, no da!" "Or to stay alive." A voice rang from above, and Chichiri vanished suddenly, just avoiding a huge bolt crashing into the earth where he had once been standing. "Chichiri...you're so resourceful. Hand over the crystal." "I don't think so, no da." The monk stood behind the hovering form. "I think you'd better give me Hotohori's crystal right now, no da!" "Or what? Will you try to attack me again?" Yogiri extended his arm, and in his hand formed a flashing sword of energy, pure dark electricity sparkling out from the razor-sharp blade. "I am not without my resources, monk, and your place is not the battlefield. Yield and I will permit you to live." Chichiri frowned slightly. "I cannot do that. I will not do that." "Then I have no choice. Defend yourself." At once, the sable-haired man was at Chichiri's throat with the blade, slashing like a harvesting farmer, but the monk was much quicker than the other man, not bothering to deal out blows but instead dodging them with expert precision. At last, the blue-haired man stopped in his tracks, glaring at Yogiri, and between his hands grew a pulsing sphere of energy, which he released as his foe leapt into the air, knocking the man back and the energy blade out of his hand; it returned to the crystal and rested on the ground, until Chichiri's gentle, careful hand scooped it up into the kasa. "You seem not to have improved, Yogiri, but I would suggest lessons, no da." Chichiri smiled his usual smile and vanished with a faint laugh. His foe picked himself up from the ground, his face a mixture of anguish and relief, and

within he was wracked with indecision. To pursue or to flee, he dangled precariously off a precipice of his mind, and he had no idea how to resolve it, to pull himself to safety or allow himself to fall to an unknown fate. Suddenly his mind was made again, and he released his grip on his subconscious, and his true self plummeted to the unknowable depths of the mind, while another steeled personality took its place, replacing the trembling ocean in his eyes with hardened emeralds. His jaw was set and his fists clenched, and at once he vanished, determined not only to regain the crystal of Hotohori, but also to acquire the crystals of Mitsukake.

Nuriko and Tasuki, both somewhat scraped and scarred, made their way down the trail that led to the cave which was now covered in stones of all shapes and sizes. Their clothes tattered and their hair disturbed, the two appeared as if they had just weathered an explosion in their best clothes. They were silent walking down the mountain and neither so much as looked at the other. Their goal was to get to the bottom, and that was what they would do. The bandit turned around and frowned. "Hadda *\$@#in' do that right when we'd found the damn thing." "At least we might get the next crystal before him." Nuriko sighed and looked at the sky. "I think another cave is around here, too...at least, your necklace seems to think so." Tasuki looked down at the jewel which was flashing, pulsating gently. "No shit! It's actually workin'!" The violet-haired man began to walk towards his partner and gently touched the piece of jewelry, smiling. "I think...I think I can see something in it...that way." He pointed to the right of the bandit. "The cave is over there. Behind that grove of trees, I'm sure of it." Tasuki nodded. "Let's get goin'. I don't want that \$*#(to get another one before we're ready." Nuriko giggled with a grin and the two were off.

Chichiri sat in the palace at Konan with the three crystals he had gathered floating before him. One was left for Hotohori's body, but he had been able to find the final Mitsukake crystal on his own without interference from the strange, almost threatening, Yogiri. The monk had the impression that there was something inside his would-be foe that was fighting back against the urge to succumb to evil, and that explained the constant failures in his attempts to stop the seishi in their efforts to acquire the crystals...but Chichiri could not be sure. He was not a telepath, but he could see strife in the man's eyes that seemed to tell a story of possession and desperation, a lust for power gone horribly wrong. The eyes were a gateway to the soul and Chichiri knew how to gaze through them to see a person's inner self. He contemplated the mists swirling inside and the strange desires to destroy coupled with the constant self-control, almost self-assault, that made Yogiri always fail in whatever mission he attempted against those others who would dare to collect the crystals. The monk reached out and took Hotohori's single crystal from the floating triad and replaced it inside the chest, then withdrew Mitsukake's first, placing it where the other one had been so recently, sending them into a clockwise motion, spinning and twisting around in the space before him. The lights, shooting from the energy pyramid, became blinding and suddenly, as the white explosion flooded the room, a voice cried out...a gentle voice, one of compassion and love...and in that instant, Chichiri glimpsed his old friend and the healer of the seishi, Mitsukake, kneeling with his hand on his head, naked as the day of his birth. Immediately the monk took a blanket beside him and wrapped it around the larger man's shoulders, for which he was given a smile and a kind laugh. "Chichiri..." "Mitsukake! It's good to see you, no da." Even without

his mask, the monk's face was cheerful. "Oh! And I have another here that will enjoy your company more, no da." He turned around and whistled quietly, and for a moment the healer simply stared at the door, but then recognition dawned as a little furry head popped around the corner, followed by the rest of the cat...it was Tama-chan! The little cat padded into the room and leaped up on Mitsukake's shoulder, but the healer instead took him into his arms and hugged the kitten tightly. Touched by the scene, Chichiri laughed and smiled, pushing the concerns of a moment before to the back of his mind. Eventually he knew he would have to face them...but for now he was content to enjoy the happiness of the present.

Nuriko pushed another half-worn column out of the way and wiped his forehead delicately. "I don't think we're going to find anything. Perhaps it was another cave around here. We should turn back." "We're not *\$(#in' turnin' back! I know that thing's around here somewhere, it's gotta be! There ain't another cave around here!" Tasuki waved his tessen frantically. The other man sighed and put his hand on the Hessian's shoulder with a smile. "I know you're reluctant to let Yogiri find it before we do, but he hasn't appeared until we've found it ourselves...I don't think he even has the first clue where to look until we give it to him, so I wouldn't prepare for battle until the time is here." At that moment, an explosion rocked the cave, blowing shards of shattered rock out at the two, who took cover behind a pile of rubble that Nuriko had amassed in his excavation attempts. From deeper within the cave came the unmistakable laugh of Yogiri, and for once he actually had arrived before the seishi; in his hand was the final crystal of Hotohori, and it was lighting the place up as bright as day. The violet-haired man gritted his teeth. "Hotohori...!" Tasuki produced his fan and eyed a formation in the rocks above his foe, then slashed through the air with the words "LEKKA SHIEN!" A volley of fiery bolts exploded into the rock above Yogiri's head and smashed down upon the man, burying him under a pile of destroyed stone and statue. The two seishi were at him in a second, combing the floor for the final crystal of their ally, but they were shocked to see Yogiri, not only alive but at full strength, behind the pile under which Tasuki thought he had buried the villain. The man laughed loudly, his teeth perfect and white, his eyes glaring out at the two. In his hand was the crystal, shining and seemingly causing his very body to shimmer with the wavering light of the magickal object. "This one I won't give up so easily. You don't have your monk friend to regain the crystal for you this time...and you know you are both no match for me." Yogiri sneered arrogantly down at the two. "I will be leaving now, with the crystal." "I don't think so." Nuriko effortlessly hurled a huge, decayed column through the air at his foe, hitting like a piledriver. Yogiri was most assuredly down this time, and Tasuki plucked the crystal from where it had fallen, into a pile of rubble, then slipped it into his pack. The two seishi watched to make sure Yogiri had not somehow used his great speed and simply faked the hit, but he was too still; certainly the aura of injury around the man could not be easily falsified. Tasuki tugged Nuriko towards the entrance, and the other man gave a cursory glance back before following, vanishing from the cave at last. However, on the ground, their adversary coughed up blood and sat slowly up, clutching his chest. He knew that easily half of his ribcage was shattered and that he would have to wait until his body began to heal itself...and it gave him only anger at what they had done. All he wanted was to be free of the thing inside of him...or was it really him? Had he created it, or was it truly an independent being? He did not know anymore. Yogiri relaxed and sighed, spitting out some more blood as

his body began the long process of rejuvenation.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Five-

"I don't know what made me do that, Tasuki." Nuriko sighed and propped his head up on his hands. "I had no reason to attack like that from the start. He could've been killed." "He won't be." The bandit sat on the floor in front of the fire as usual and began to work on a map that depicted the local area. "I just know it. That *\$#(will be back, sooner than ya think." Nuriko nodded and stood, looking out the window...rain again. "I haven't seen this much rain in years. I wonder what's going on?" "'Chiri said somethin' about the book." "The book?" Tasuki nodded. "Yep." He scribbled down something on the map. "He thinks somebody's foolin' with the book." "Well, you learn fast." The other man peered over his friend's shoulder at the writing. "Fooling with the book? What does that mean for us?" "I ain't sure!" The Hessian grumbled. "Ask 'Chiri, he knows more about it than me." "He isn't back yet." "Then wait till he gets back! I've gotta look at this map." Nuriko shrugged and looked out the window again, waiting for his other friend's arrival.

Chichiri sat, staring out over the land from his vantage point on the cliff. Somehow he balanced himself there, but there was almost not even room for him. He gazed at the surrounding countryside, contemplating the issues at hand. A new adversary had manifested itself...old allies were being reunited...but there were still some missing. He had found no crystals of Chiriko and the ones of Hotohori were not responding to his magicks. He also doubted that there would be any of Miaka or Tamahome, since they seemed to be happily living out their lives in Miaka's world. But there was something that distinctly bothered him. What if, somehow, something had changed with the properties of the worlds, if Miaka was somehow tricked into coming into this world and...no, he could think of it no more. She was gone from the land forever, to live out the rest of her life with her beloved Tamahome. The two were not going to return, ever, and he knew that in his heart of hearts. Except he began to sense their approach, and it unsettled him so greatly that he immediately teleported down to the courtyard at Konan and walked into the room where two of his friends were assembled. He looked at the first. "Nuriko...I feel something on the horizon, no da...something that is coming, and we must prepare." He gripped his staff and smacked the base against the floor. "We have to find the stones of Chiriko and learn how to restore the emperor, no da." The other man nodded, and the bandit rose from the floor. "If Chiriko's gonna have crystals, they're gonna be here." He pointed to an area on the map. "From what you told me, I've figured it out." Nuriko raised an eyebrow and examined the work that his friend had done. "This is...really amazing, Tasuki..." He blinked a few times and scanned over the map. "You've really learned...quite a lot...since the last time we met." "I got bored. 'Chiri spent some time teachin' me things." The redhead passed the map to the monk and stood, arms folded. "I got tired'a bein' left outta everything important." "All right..." Chichiri nodded and folded up the paper. "I will tell Mitsukake to join us, and we can go try and find Chiriko, no da. Perhaps he will know how to revive the emperor, no da." The three nodded and prepared to set out.

Some time later, as the sun was hot again in the misty sky, the four figures made their way across the fields, the tall grasses nipping at their hands. Sweat beaded up on each one's forehead, and even the

multiple stops for rest they made were not enough; it was just too hot to continue for very far at a time. At last, the cooling canopy of forest surrounded them, and they made camp, sitting among the tall trees that stood around them as if guarding them from outside influence. The moon finally rose and the night breeze swept across the land quickly, refreshing in its cool comfort. Tasuki sat, staring into the flames, his mind not wholly in the here and now, just losing himself in thought. The others were much the same, even though Chichiri's attempts at meditation and Mitsukake's amusement with the cat were transparent attempts at diversion. Nuriko stood, leaning on a tree trunk, and through his mind danced the reality of the situation, the strange and disturbing details surrounding their entire quest, and the mysterious adversary whose name was not familiar, backed by a power that was not fully controlled, apparently. Without warning, suddenly the fire blew out and all present started, each scanning the surroundings for any sign of attackers. As quickly as the wind, a ghostly image appeared where the campfire had once been...a phantasmal rendering of Chiriko. "To the north...you must go...to the north." It spoke with a great distortion in its voice, and the tone was somewhat older than the seishi were used to. "You will find me there, but not all of you...it is a rift...and therein lies the priestess..." "Not...all of us?" Nuriko knelt beside Tasuki. "What do you mean?" The child looked out. "Must...divide...must...return!" As if in pain, the image flickered and the expression on its face was a sour one. "Cannot remain. Too great...a strain...goodbye and...good..." With that, the fire sparked back into existence, and everyone present simply stared for a moment, silent, until at last, Mitsukake spoke. "Did he say that the priestess was in a rift?" Chichiri sat, brooding. "I don't think so, no da. It was hard for him to put it into words, but I think...I think that he had a different message. That the priestess...I don't know. I will have to think." "What if we don't have any F***in' time??" Tasuki smacked his fist into his open hand. "We've gotta do somethin'!!!!"

A cloaked figure sat before a small fire as the hills stretched into the horizon, the crystals floating before him, all three bearing a certain symbol upon them. He concentrated and took a deep breath... then began to play a slender flute he produced from within the folds of his cloak. Energy surrounded him and the hood over his face fell back, revealing a beautiful face, with golden eyes, framed by flaxen locks that dangled down in a reckless way. The music and the energy seemed to become as one, and the crystals spun faster and faster, until at last a bright light exploded out from them and a naked body...with a face much like the flautist's...lay where they formerly floated. The man removed his cloak and picked up the other, younger man, wrapping him in it tightly, holding the man to his chest tightly. "Suboshi..." He stroked the younger man's hair and smiled sadly, a single tear rolling down his cheek and dripping onto the folds of the huge cloak, then hugged the other man to him again and kissed his forehead. At last, the younger one began to stir, his eyelashes fluttering as his eyes focused on his elder. "...it can't be...Ami...Amiboshi...?" "My little angel..." The two embraced and the cloak fell away, but Amiboshi reached down and pulled it up again around his brother, tears flowing freely. "I missed you so much...life has been so cruel to you..." The two sat in a tight embrace for a brief time, and then the first kissed his brother, but it was not the usual sort of fraternal affection; this was an intense expression of love...or perhaps more. The two spent another few moments locked in the kiss, then it broke, Suboshi wiping the spit

from his chin, smiling exhaustedly. His eyes fogged with tears as well, and he buried his face in his brother's chest. Amiboshi stroked his hair gently. "I missed you so much..."

Chichiri and Mitsukake made their way slowly down the path, the bitter winds biting at their skin. The healer looked around, shielding his face from the worst of the elements, and then spoke. "We're close, right?" The monk nodded and looked around. "It can't be much farther at all, no da. I feel it near." At that, a black energy blast flashed in between the two, sending them apart. They both looked up at the same time to see the sable-haired, cloaked figure floating before them, one Chichiri knew from previous encounters as none other than their new enemy. "Yogiri...so you've come..." "I'd say it's good to see you again, but I lie so very unconvincingly." The man descended and alighted upon the path before them. "I see you've found yet another friend...I'll delight in quickly returning him to those crystals." A chi blast from the monk blew apart a rock on the cliffside just adjacent to the path, and a thin cloud of smoke enveloped Yogiri. The wind blasted through, and when he emerged from the dust, he saw where his two foes had been, but also that they were now gone, the only evidence of their ever having stood there blowing away in the wind that had destroyed the distraction. "I will have your priestess. I will return her to crystals, and then what will you do?" He laughed to himself and vanished again, as mysteriously as he had appeared. "Then what will you do...?"

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Six-

Nuriko and Tasuki plodded along towards the palace grounds, the bandit occasionally looking over to see how his companion was amusing the cat as they travelled quietly. As the trees and grasses of the beautiful land passed by, the two knew they were growing ever closer to their familiar territory, and they prepared to return to more comfortable surroundings, each still wondering about their friend's motivation to send them both back while he and the healer Mitsukake journeyed forth to try and find the young sage Chiriko. The birds were singing the song to lament the setting of the sun by the time the two reached the grounds once more, and they made their way into the room that was so familiar to them, the popular gathering room of all the seishi and the other inhabitants of the palace. Tasuki took a swig from his flask and replaced it in his pack, then sat that down on a seat and flopped down in the one next to it. Nuriko made his comfort by the fire, still playing with Tama-chan somewhat absently. "I wonder what the others are doing right now..." The bandit snorted. "Probably walkin', all quiet as usual." He sat back in the chair and looked over. "Guess they're about to the place they were goin' by now." Nuriko nodded. "I'd think so, anyway. I hope they're able to find Chiriko all right. We need him..." "Yeah, it'd be nice to have Hotohori on our side again. He was one fine swordsman." The redhead played with a small blade that he had produced from his pack. "I wonder if Miaka's really comin' back." "I guess we'll find out soon enough, if that apparition was true." "Mnn." Tasuki nodded and put the blade away, going over to the chest and taking out Hotohori's crystals. "There gotta be other stones for the other gods...I just wonder if they got someone ta get 'em..." "If they have, then we at least haven't encountered them yet." "Unless..." Nuriko looked over. "Unless...? Unless what?" "Unless that Yogiri guy is tryin' to stop the other gods from gettin' their seishi back. It makes sense, don't it?" He put the three stones back inside the chest and looked back at Nuriko. "We're gonna take a trip." "Where?" "First we're gonna go to

Kutou country...then...I don't know."

Chichiri and Mitsukake stepped over the many rocks in their path, at least relieved that the winds had stopped their attack and that the temperature had risen somewhat. Mitsukake was no fan of the mountains, and his companion, although accustomed to them, was not overly fond of them, either. On reflection, the monk though, perhaps he should have brought Tasuki. "Wait...Chichiri." The healer put a hand on his friend's shoulder, and the two stopped. "There's something in the distance...I can't see it clearly...it's two people?" The monk nodded and peered to the horizon. "I think so, no da. We'd better wait to see their intentions before doing anything else, Mitsukake no da." They stood still, and the figures in the distance quickly got closer and closer, until at last they were within touching distance. The two Suzaku seishi were rather surprised by the identities of the new arrivals. "Tokaki...Subaru...! What are you doing here, no da?" His face was a mixture of surprise and slight tension. "Well, you are in Sairou country, Chichiri." The man who had been addressed as 'Tokaki' folded his arms, a young man with silky, snowy hair and a face to melt the hearts of any that might gaze upon it. "It's been a long time...were you invited by our priest?" "Priest?" Chichiri frowned, surprised. "I thought you had a priestess...but I thought she..." "She is." Subaru chimed in. "We had some more developments since last time we met...a lot of things have changed." "I know it's not really formal, but would you like to rest for a while? The temple isn't far from here at all." The brown-haired seishi smiled, holding his wife close. "We can take you there in a matter of minutes." "Well...we were really on our way to an urgent meeting, no da, but..." He looked at Mitsukake. "I suppose a few minutes won't hurt it." The two Byakko seishi nodded and led the way, into the distance by way of the path.

Amiboshi and Suboshi looked around the abandoned temple, first at the altar and then the rest of the rooms...every single room had been left to itself for so long. It seemed the very life had been totally drained from it, and even the tiniest footstep echoed within the empty chambers. The younger spoke. "Brother...what happened while I was... asleep?" The word seemed to have to be forced out between reluctant lips. The other man closed his eyes, still pained by the events that came before. "Many things...among them, our eventual defeat. Seiryuu has no more seishi other than us...I haven't found any other stones at all." "There must be!" Suboshi's eyes lit up with a fire of purpose and intensity. "We have to find them!" "How? It took a miracle for me to find yours...I was very lucky. Nothing more." Amiboshi sighed and ran his slender fingers through his fine, silky hair. "I don't think I could possibly find all the other crystals that it would take to restore the other seishi...and I am not entirely convinced that I'd want to." Suboshi sat on an unmade, unkempt bed and moped. "I say we must at least try. I'm going to try even if you won't." He got to his feet and strode towards the door, but his brother's arm stopped him, and the younger boy gasped despite himself at the touch that drew him back to the other man's chest again. "I'll try, just for you, but you have to promise me to control yourself and be careful. Promise me that." The boy nodded. "Yes, I will. I promise."

Chichiri and Mitsukake rested in the sitting room, sipping refreshing beverages and eating the delicious local cuisine. Their hosts had left a few moments before to retrieve the surprise that they were sure would amaze their guests, and the two expectantly eyed the

doorway. At the first sound, they both looked up, their eyes coming into contact with the two seishi that had escorted them into the temple, then six others...four men and two women. After them, a man in a huge, elaborate outfit entered, looking somewhat uncomfortable but otherwise friendly. He smiled at them pleasantly and sat before them at the table in a fluid motion. "It's good to meet you, Chichiri and Mitsukake...Tokaki and Subaru have told me so much about you." He giggled a bit effeminately, reminding the monk of another of his friends, and the priest then fixed himself a cup of tea and sipped it just as gingerly. "So tell me, what brings you to the country of Byakko?" Chichiri spoke first, as usual, and smirked a little. "We seek a friend of ours, no da. He was last seen in this area, and we have been going to find him, no da." The priest smiled gently and sipped his tea. "I will have some of my seishi help you." "That's not necessary, no da..." "No, they know this country much better than you...I wouldn't want any horrible fate to befall you, master Chichiri..." At first the monk was going to answer, but he fell silent as he saw the sincerity in the other man's eyes. He had eyes that were older than his form would imply, and Chichiri knew it was useless to protest. "All right...your help is much appreciated, sir, no da." "Don't call me that...my name's Akira. I already consider you an intimate friend, master Chichiri...and master Mitsukake." Mitsukake smiled slightly and nodded, and Chichiri blushed a little, flattered and embarrassed simultaneously. "Thank you, no da... I see you have new seishi..." "Not exactly." He smiled at the monk. "We know about these crystals too...but I have some more information for you. They won't be around for very much longer, so you must make haste...please, for your sakes. It was so difficult for me to return my seishi to life, especially figuring out how to restore the youth to my two special surviving guardians..." "What about the previous priestess?" Chichiri spoke up, and at Akira's expression, he caught himself and calmed his tone and expression. "Ahh, I'm sorry...I'm just curious, no da. You don't have to answer." "I don't have to answer in any case." The man smiled and then chuckled, suddenly. "The former priestess and her lover...one of the seishi...have gone off to happiness. She willingly gave up her post and well...I found myself here. I'm sure you understand the story." Chichiri nodded. "I remember very well...I understand." "And so, let me introduce my seishi to you." He gestured to the group, and they moved apart and towards their seated priest. "First, you know Tokaki and Subaru, right? I know they're inimitable and the best at what they do." The two grinned widely at the guests and moved off towards the fire, then an average-sized woman with short-cropped black hair down to her jaw stepped forth, a confident but accepting expression on her face as she threw her head back, smiling widely. "This is Tokaki...one of the last ones we were able to find..." Another stepped up as his predecessor stepped out of the way, a man that was garbed in a long coat that stretched to his ankles, where there were thick boots that garbed his feet and extended up into the coat's interior. Across his chest wrapped a sash, fastened at the belt he wore around his waist, and the remainder dangled down at his side. "This is Karasuki..." He gestured to the man, who stepped over to join the others, and a handsome man with long, black hair in a long ponytail, garbed in a fine tunic and trousers, stepped forward with a smile. "And this..." Akira blushed slightly, and Chichiri noticed but said nothing, "this is...Amefuri." The final one that stepped forward was a tall man with white hair that dangled down past his shoulders, and his ice-blue eyes flashed out at them all. His clothes were similar to the previous man's, and he smiled slightly and quickly. "This is Kokie...he was one of my first guardians." Akira nodded to the man,

who went to the others, and then the young priest gestured to Amefuri, who instantly took his place beside his priest, sitting politely and fixing himself a cup of tea. "I would trust your safety to Amefuri..." The man beside him brightened up. "However, I simply can't bear to part with him." He then became slightly sullen. "But since that is so, I will simply accompany you as well." Amefuri spilled his tea. "But my priest, you can't do that! It's too dangerous in those mountains!" "I have made my decision." He seemed to smirk mischievously, and the dark-haired man sat down with a sigh. "I won't let you go alone...you know how I feel about that." Chichiri coughed slightly. "Er...I suppose we should get going if these crystals will not be around for long...?" "Ah, yes." Akira rose to his feet and smiled again, gesturing to Amefuri, who returned with two spearlike weapons, one of which the priest took. "We'll leave now...Amefuri will, of course, lead." The Byakko seishi blushed deeply. "If...if you'd be so kind as to come this way, Chichiri...Mitsukake..."

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Seven-

Nuriko folded his arms. "Are you satisfied, Tasuki? We've turned this place upside down...there's nobody here at all." He sighed. "It was a risk just getting into this place, but to stay here and look through every room...it's a death wish. Just because there aren't any seishi here doesn't mean that Seiryuu isn't still exerting power over this realm." "I know that!" Tasuki sorted through some objects in a cabinet, tossing them on the floor. "There ain't no stones here. I guess they ain't found 'em yet." "I told you we should've just waited." At that, the necklace hanging around the bandit's neck began to glow, and he rose, slowly. "Waited, huh? I think we're gonna get the stones before anyone else 'n make sure they don't get their bad guys back..." Nuriko followed his companion out into the hall and down, into another room, where they knelt beside a shelf. The bandit leaned over and reached under it, and when he withdrew his hand, a crystal of pure white was in it. Neither knew what to make of it, as there was not a mark on it, just the purest white that they had ever seen, composed of the same materials of the other stones. "I wonder if there are more...in here..." Nuriko reached out and touched the thing, and to his surprise it was warm. "That's odd... it's warm for some reason." "The others're warm too, just not this kinda warm." Tasuki put it into his pack. "We'd better take it with us, just in case." "Let's try and find any others that might be here...if this is some sort of sign, then we have to make sure that this sort of power doesn't fall into the wrong hands." Tasuki nodded, and the two went about their search.

Four figures moved up the path toward the snow-covered ruins. Two were the familiar sights of Chichiri and Mitsukake, while the other two appeared strange to the eye that saw mainly the seishi of Suzaku, of the Konan country to the south. The first, leading, was a tall man with silken black hair tied back in a ponytail, dressed in a tunic and trousers, with thick boots on his feet and a spearlike weapon in his hand. The other, with somewhat lighter hair, held the same sort of weapon, with a long coat and similar boots...under that it was a mystery. "Akira...how much farther, no da?" Chichiri walked with his staff as an aid. The man in the coat turned around. "Ask Amefuri...he's the one who knows this country. I'm relatively new to these parts and I have not so much as set foot in these mountains." Before the monk asked, the man in the lead turned. "It's only another few minutes. The place is around here somewhere, I assure you. I used

to play up here as a child..." Mitsukake smirked. "Not a place for children to play, is it though? You must've been an exceptional boy." "He still is." Akira grinned widely, which instantly caused all the others to blush, and Amefuri to giggle nervously. "Sorry, my dear guardian. Lead on." They plodded on through the snow.

Two almost identical figures sat in the sun as clouds passed overhead and the wind bent the grass halfway down to the ground. One was younger, that much was apparent, and he was of course the first to his feet before much time at all passed. "We've got to get going now, brother. I can't wait any longer to get the stones." Amiboshi lied back and put his hands under his head, smiling up at the younger man. "Relax...we have time. I don't think that destroying ourselves to restore the others will help anyone, least of all us." Suboshi flopped down beside his brother...then rolled over and draped his arm across the other man, resting his head on his brother's chest. "All right...for now. But I'm going to go in a few minutes." "That's fine with me. I'll be coming with you, anyway, you know." Amiboshi stroked his brother's hair and smiled casually. "You have such beautiful hair." He then shivered, despite himself, at his own touch. "I had forgotten how wonderful it felt...how it...made my neck tingle..." "Me too." The younger gently kissed his brother's soft lips, and it was like kissing himself. "I missed you most of all, brother." "I missed you as well." Amiboshi sighed and held Suboshi more tightly. "Nobody understands you like I do...nobody knows you like I do...nobody could miss you like I..." The younger boy nodded and rested his head once more. "Yes... I know that now. I'm sorry...I'm so sorry..." "Don't be sorry. Don't ever be sorry, not for anything." His fingers still consolingly stroked the other man's hair. "I mean that. I don't want you to be sorry. You had enough of that." Amiboshi lay there with the younger man atop him in a half- embrace. He had finally achieved happiness...and whatever it took, he would help his brother to become fully content.

"Not again! This's gettin' ta be a habit." Tasuki growled at the sharply-dressed man who held the two crystals they had worked so hard to find among the abandoned ruins of the Seiryuu temple. "LEKKA SHIEN!" Flames flashed out, but instead of moving, the man gestured and a mystical shield deflected the attack, sending it across the room, where it blew apart a small fixture. "I've learned some since our last encounter, Tasuki. Don't think me so easily defeated this time." "I'd hope not. Last time was like fighting a child." Nuriko grabbed a fragment of wood and hurled it at Yogiri, who moved at the last minute...but not fast enough; it was able to slash his cheek, and blood trickled down his face to his chin. "Well, it appears that you have learned as well. But now I can only take my leave of you." With that, he extended his hand, and an explosion of light and sound blew through the room. When it faded, the man was gone, leaving the two seishi to wonder as to his whereabouts. Last time, it had been easy. There was only one way out of the cave. This time, he had used sneaky tricks and slipped out...with their findings...before they had noticed at all. "Dammit!" Tasuki stamped his foot. "I *KNEW* dat was gonna happen sooner or later!!!" "Just calm down, we'll get them back." Nuriko stood, one hand on his hip and the other thoughtfully cradling his chin. "He seems to be unable to resist a fight with us, so we just have to wait for the next time he picks one. Then we can be prepared and get back those two crystals. He only has improved his technique once, so I doubt that he would take the time to vastly improve when he got away with the prize this time." "You got a good point there." Tasuki ran to the hallway, and his friend rushed to

catch up as the bandit dashed across the grounds and back towards the south and familiar country. "Hey! Where are we going now?" "Back to the palace! I've gotta check somethin' before we go anywhere else!"

The four men stared at the icelike pillar that stood before them, perfect in its shape and smoothness, and as for the vision that it bore within, it was a man, clear by his unclothed nature, young and in his prime, his body lean and slender but not unfit, with white-blond hair in twin buns, one on each side of his head, and the rest of the hair trailing down. The face was very feminine, however, and had he not been completely nude there might have been some doubt as to the man's gender. Instead, there was a confusion about his identity. "I don't understand...Chiriko was supposed to be here." The healer peered at the column before him. "This is a person unknown to me altogether..." Chichiri stared at the strange man before him for a moment, then nodded. "I think that he might still be, no da." He turned to Akira. "We have to find a way to free this man from the pillar, no da. Any ideas?" The priest shook his head. "Unfortunately I really don't have any ideas right now. I'm still adjusting to this world's magickal system, and anything I do might make the situation worse. Amefuri...?" The man beside him nodded. "I might be able to help. I have a special ability that could be useful in this situation." Amefuri handed his weapon to Akira and stepped forward, through the rubble and to the pillar, and he touched it, closing his eyes and concentrating. As he did so, the place where he touched it began to form a circle...then a web...and the web grew until it was a living net of energy, circulating within the lines that had developed from the origin of touch. The man stepped well back, along with the others, and when he finally nodded, the pillar shattered, the strange and transparent material of its design fell away, leaving the man within to float, suspended by some unknown power. Mitsukake stepped forward, extending a hand, and the man took it and stepped down to the ground, at which point Akira removed his coat and wrapped it around the stranger, who looked out at the others. "The priestess...is in danger." At that, he fell unconscious, leaving the other four only to wonder at his words.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Eight-

Chichiri watched as Mitsukake stayed at the nameless man's side and made sure that he was recovering as well as he could, while the monk himself contemplated the events that had just happened. They had come to find Chiriko, and instead they had found this stranger, who according to Akira, was another of the Byakko seishi, the final one they needed to locate, the newest one in their number. "How is he doing, no da?" Mitsukake wiped his sweaty brow. "He'll be all right as long as we can keep him here for the rest of the day. He seems to have been suspended there for a long time, but he was never affected by the elements at all." "That's wonderful...it's good to see that someone will be taking over the position vacated by Tataru..." They both looked up to see Akira in the doorway, for once not accompanied by his favorite seishi. "I was beginning to worry that my seishi would be forever incomplete." He smiled and sat beside Mitsukake, checking the stranger for fever and discomfort. "This is amazing...he's been so protected by that pillar...I almost think we did more damage to him ourselves by breaking it." "He'll be all right once he gets used to the outside...I'm sure it's just a transition period." Mitsukake sat back, exhausted, and the priest rose to his feet. "You two should come with me into the gathering room. I've had

a nice meal prepared for you and you certainly need it after all the effort you've put in to healing my new seishi...and I will eternally be grateful to you for all that you've done." "We are grateful to you, Akira no da...but we have to go and find our real goal...one of our own seishi is trapped on the mountain and we have to find him..." "I'm here, Chichiri..." The three men looked to the bed, where the new arrival had sat up...his eyes were open and his mouth curled into a smile. "You found me." "But why...why are you in this form, Chiriko...?" "You know why...I couldn't chance recovering the great evil that existed in my old body..." Chichiri sighed, realized the truth in his friend's statement. "I understand." He looked into Chiriko's eyes. "What is your message, that you were trying to tell us earlier?" The other man brushed his light blond hair out of his face and looked intently at the other three gathered there. "The stones are temporary, just as this priest has told you...but there is more. You see, this only happens every two thousand years...and only when a few certain things are in place." "Did we do this?" Chichiri knelt by his former ally. "No...another has done it. There is another who is sleeping, and who will not awaken until it suits him to do so. And only one who can stop him from it." "Who is this person?" "I can't say...it's kept from me and I can no longer see past the veils of these worlds." Chiriko sighed. "I'm sorry, Chichiri..." "It's all right...what else do you need to tell me?" "The priestess is in dire danger...if the temple is empty, then she will die." "Ah, that is where we have triumphed then." Chichiri smiled widely. "We sent Tasuki and Nuriko back there." "They are not at the temple...another force has clouded their minds. I knew this was happening just as I emerged from my column... but I don't know anything else." "They aren't there?" Chichiri leaped to his feet. "I'm going to teleport back. Mitsukake...you will have to join me as soon as you can. I don't know if I can make it all in one trip, but I intend to try." The healer nodded from where he was sitting, and Akira looked up. "Good luck, Chichiri...may your priestess be saved."

A bright light flashed in the middle of the courtyard at the palace, and a wind more intense than any other began to rush through the flowers and trees there...explosions spun out like fireworks and lit up the darkening sky as bright as noon, and in the midst of it all, a figure appeared in the middle of the spherical portal...followed by a separate figure, larger and more angled. Chichiri popped into existence near this and was blown off his feet at once, tossed into a wall and his clothes torn. He stood up against the gale-force winds and attempted to move away from the building, but to no avail at all. He squinted even more than usual and put his arm before his eyes, attempting to make out the figures that were forming in the courtyard...and instinctively he knew who they were before even seeing them. As the portal slipped shut, two figures, one male and one female, collapsed to the ground below, and Chichiri forced his aching muscles into action to join them. He knelt beside them, recognizing his former friend, Tamahome, now reincarnated into Miaka's world, and his former priestess, Miaka, somewhat older than the last time they had met, and in much worse condition. He sighed. "This is not good...I've got to get Mitsukake here as soon as possible...but I can't teleport him...the strain would kill me. But if I don't...Miaka could die..."

Amiboshi and Suboshi sat, watching over the young, beautiful woman with cranberry blonde hair, her expression still one of blissful slumber. They both found it somewhat disturbing, but their former friend Soi was at least back in their company, if not conscious of

the fact. "That's one...I can't believe we found all of them, but it is going to take us forever to find the others." Amiboshi put his flute to his mouth and blew a few notes, tentatively. "We are going to have to have priorities. Who will we try for first?" "I didn't know we could choose." Suboshi frowned by the fire. "If we had to, I'd say we have to get Nakago...and let him choose." "I can't find those stones, remember? They weren't in the temple and my flute can't help me...it says they're not around here." "We have to find them. He's the only one that would be able to decide properly as to how we should go about this." Amiboshi nodded solemnly. "I'll try." He began to play on his flute once more, and the notes drifted into the sky above the forest...

Yogiri placed the two stones in an ornate container, smiling as he touched its metallic front. "One more left, and then I'll have no need to go out myself and collect these stones...one more and then this world will be under my control, at last." He grinned widely and then set the frame down and stepped over to a stone font, apparently the same one that he had destroyed before, and he dabbled his finger in it. "Show me the last stone's location." A scene rippled into view, and Yogiri cackled to himself. "Is that it? I'll go to it immediately, in that case." He walked off and the font shuddered at every footstep, as if it were alive.

"Oh Chichiri, it's so good to see you again." Miaka wrapped her arms around the monk's neck and hugged him tightly before settling back down into her bed with a sigh. "I don't know what's happening...I feel awful..." "Mitsukake's coming, no da. Just relax." "Mitsukake?" Her eyes widened. "But I thought..." "It's different now. Many things have changed, Miaka...and I have to find a way to get you home." "Home...? But something brought me here for a reason, I know, and I can't just go home without doing something about it..." "Miaka...I know you want to help...but if you stay here, you will die. I know that much." The monk let out a heavy sigh. "The other seishi have been appearing again, one by one, as we find their three crystals...they are similar to the ones that restored Tamahome's memory in your world...but different in that they can only appear when the time is right and are only here for a very temporary period." Miaka sat up, nodding. "But what does this have to do with me? I can't see the connection." "Neither can I, Miaka, but Chiriko warned me that your life was in danger, and I have to protect you." He smiled and smacked his staff against the floor, letting it make its melodious jingling sound. "You understand, of course." She smiled and laughed a little, exhausted from her ordeal. "I do, Chichiri." She looked around her. "Is Taka in here?" The monk nodded. "Yes...he's not doing so well though, Miaka, and I must request that you do not go in to see him until Mitsukake arrives. I don't think he would want anyone to interfere, not even you at this point..." At first the woman seemed uncomfortable, but then she settled reluctantly back in her bed and nodded. "I understand. I don't want to endanger his life any more than I already have." Chichiri looked up. "Miaka..." "No...I know that I'm dangerous to be around. I almost can't bear to think about how many people have died or will die because of me just being near them...I ought to just stay here...maybe Taka would be better off in my world without his memories if I could find a way to do it..." "Don't talk like that. You know it's not true." The monk sat forward in his chair. "I know you're depressed...and I understand it." She nodded. "You're right...just put up with me for a little while." She smiled, admittedly an effort. "I'll get better soon, I think." Chichiri

smiled back at her, relieved that nothing had happened to ruin their reunion.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Nine-

Tasuki held up the third and final white stone. "Here it is! I got it!" His companion joined him and peered at it. "That's it, all right...now, for that Yogiri to try and come to claim it..." In a flash of light, exactly that happened. The form of the villain outlined in the air and materialized before them, an arrogant sneer on his face. He extended a hand. "I'd ask you to give that to me, but I suppose you'd just want to try and take the others. Well, I don't have them with me at the moment." "Where did you take them?" Nuriko was instantly on the offense, tightening his fists and tensing his muscles. "Do you think I'd actually tell you that?" The sable-haired man laughed loudly, then stared at the two seishi before him. "I can't do that. In fact, you can never be allowed to penetrate my inner sanctum. And so I will simply kill you here and take the stone which you possess that completes this cycle." He raised his other arm, but not fully, as Tasuki's fan sliced through his sleeve and a good bit into the arm itself. Yogiri let out a scream as blood soaked through the fabric of his tunic and ran down his fingers. "You...bastard!!! I'll kill you!" He lashed out at the bandit with a solid bolt of destruction, which Tasuki nimbly dodged, but the ground was not so lucky; under him, huge craters were pummelled into the earth. Yogiri then doubled over, clutching at his right arm. He was incredulous at the possibility that they had been able to actually wound his body by a direct attack...but he had never been all that good at hand-to-hand combat. He picked himself off the ground and glared at them, daring them to come closer. Nuriko did, rearing back for a hard punch, his symbol glowing from his chest. He let out a combat scream and lunged forward, to deliver the blow that would at the very least knock their assailant out of the battle, or possibly future battles as well. But as quickly as he had before, Yogiri dodged, rolling across the floor to face them again with a series of blasts, knocking the two seishi off their feet at once. The villain swept past them, snatching the crystal, and then vanished once again. Nuriko looked up. "We...lost...!" "@)#!in' a, we did." He slammed his fist down on the ground. "An' now he's got somebody who's got some power."

Chichiri sat curled up in the chair, watching over his former priestess, breathing deeply, his eyes closed. At the slightest noise, he opened them, looking around the room, finding only the small sounds of the wind outside, still whistling through the branches from the earlier disturbance caused by the portal. The monk rose to his feet and cautiously entered the other bedchamber, replacing the now-dried rag on a handsome, short-haired man's head with another, more moist one. He sighed and stood there for a moment, then stepped back. The man was in a bad way, and Chichiri knew it very well. "Ahhh...Tamahome my friend...I wish you were here with us now. You used to always inspire me." He looked towards the door and saw a stirring. "Excuse me..." As he crept to the door, the shadows flickered along the wall, and he noticed that there was more than one person awake, although nobody at all was making any noise whatsoever. He knew instinctively that it was not Mitsukake, and he entered the room, his eyes setting on the intruder. "Oh...oh great Suzaku, no..." Standing over the bed was a familiar figure...a man, fit and muscular, lean and strong, his naked form completely exposed to the air around him. He seemed somewhat disoriented, but he smiled over at

the monk as if he were in the most natural of positions. "Chichiri...so we meet again." "Nakago..." The man took up the covers of the bed and wrapped them around his form, his face still stretched into a wide grin. "It's been a long time. I didn't think that you'd still be here." "I didn't think I'd ever see you again either, Nakago." The monk clasped his staff tightly. "Frankly, I hoped I never would." "That sounds like something you would say. But you know, I have to warn you, there is absolutely no way you can stop me from doing what I have to do. You know that, don't you?" He caressed Miaka's face with the back of his hand, and Chichiri noticed that the woman did not move in the slightest. "If you've harmed her...!" "I haven't. She was well unconscious when I came here. But I know my purpose. And I know that I will be successful in it." With that, he moved like lightning and drew Miaka up in his arms, vanishing with another flash of light. "Noooo!!!! NOOOO!!!!" Chichiri rushed to the bed, grasping at the air, then he pounded his fists on the mattress. "No...please...not this...not this..."

Soi stumbled through the night, pushing past branches and other foliage in her intent quest. She had left the company of the other two remaining Seiryuu seishi as soon as she woke, after the persistent dream finished pricking at her mind...she saw it in her mind's eye and then in her real vision...the palace at Konan. The place where she would, at last, be reunited with her one true love... she still held him in her heart, despite everything that had gone before...she had realized during her own slumber that she was only made for one man...or perhaps she had been used...she didn't care. There was a singular face in her mind...and that was the blond, beautiful visage of Nakago. Within her chest grew a fire of desire for the only man she would call her master, the only man who she had ever considered worthy for her to give herself to. She steeled her resolve. This was more than sex, more than the carnal desires that flashed behind her eyes. She became her goal, and once again she quickened her pace, feeling herself honed, disciplined for her purpose. She knelt behind the trees and peered out at the palace grounds while licking her lips. At last, she had arrived, and the object of her quest was close, she knew. All she needed do was wait, and so she sat completely still, biding her time until she could at last act.

"She's gone." Amiboshi nodded at his brother as he played a beautiful tune on his flute, the wind running through his hair. "I don't think I'm going to ever see her again." The flautist nodded again, staring off into the sky. "I'm sorry, brother." At last the man set down his instrument and wrapped his arms gently around his younger brother. "Don't be. You couldn't have known what would happen. It's impossible to." In his heart, Suboshi felt a pain that he traced back to the priestess he used to serve...and felt the pain of disloyalty, from what he felt was betraying his former master, Seiryuu. He knew that Yui was long gone and that Seiryuu had faded back to the realm of the gods, wherever they might live, but he felt like he missed her, like the love he shared with his brother was somehow wrong in her absence. But as the other man's arm tightened affectionately around his chest, he felt the warmth inside his heart that made the others seem like mere embers of the inferno raging within him. He turned and kissed his brother, and they both smiled at the same time...Suboshi settled down into the other man's chest as he was embraced and closed his eyes, letting his tension fade away...that was the only way they could ever relax, and without his brother he felt lost. Amiboshi was thinking along the same lines...about how empty he felt inside when

he knew his brother had died. He knew it, and at once his life became completely hollow. Nothing he did seemed right...and he blamed himself more than anyone for the tragedy. He had been so happy at one time, and when he realized that time was with Suboshi, he felt crushed. Other loves could only attempt to take the place of his brother...but that one was the most perfect, the most innocent of all. He kissed the top of his brother's head and sighed happily, thinking about the places they could go, but something instinctively drew him back to the Seiryuu temple. He refused himself. He would not allow him and his brother to be returned into the webs of plots and counterplots that had so disgusted him before; they had been used as pawns and then discarded, which was something he was not ready to allow again, and something in him knew that, should they return, they would once more be enslaved as they had before. "Suboshi..." "Yes?" The younger man looked up. "We're going to go west...and never look back." At first Suboshi was reluctant, but he saw the intense love, the warmth in his brother's eyes...and his resolve melted. "Anywhere you go, I'll go with you. Okay, brother?" Amiboshi nodded and his eyes misted with tears again. It was so perfect...he never wanted it to be tainted so like last time.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Ten-

Yogiri gazed at Miaka, and she looked back at him, her eyes filled with confusion but no less strong or impenetrable. Her form was still covered by a nightdress, and the cold surroundings made it very difficult for her to keep herself from shivering. "You're not scared, but you're cold...please forgive me." The man reached over to Nakago and stripped him of his only garb, the thick blanket that he had stolen from Miaka's bed, and tossed it to the young woman. "It's so hard to find good help these days." Nakago stood there, as if taunting her with his body. His eyes seemed to hide something, and Miaka looked straight into them, avoiding the rest of his form as if intentionally. She could feel that there was something lurking there, behind those eyes, something more than she had encountered before, but she could not put her mind upon it just yet and so she ceased, returning her attention to the immediate threat. "Yogiri...what do you want from me?" He smiled again and crossed over to Nakago, looking him over, then smiling and caressing the other man's chest. "I want you in your totality. There is nothing you have that I do not want." Miaka frowned, unsure of who he meant. She sighed and looked at the ground. "I won't cooperate. My seishi will save me." "They are no longer your seishi, Miaka." The man looked up and sneered at her. "You've been gone too long. You haven't even the power to summon a fraction of Suzaku to this world...you are all but useless to them now." She began to open her mouth in protest, but she shut it just as quickly, knowing that there was an unavoidable truth in his words. She was just a girl now, one that was intent on living her life in the dull world she knew, the unexciting, unexceptional land where things were never as exciting as the temporary home she had in the Land of the Four Gods...and that she had, by her absence, somehow thrown off the flow of time and doomed herself to disconnection with her own lord, Suzaku. She closed her eyes tightly, and an image of Tamahome appeared behind them...and when she opened them again, she was once more alone.

"It wasn't your fault, you two." Chichiri sat, depressed and dark, before the fire, looking out at Tasuki and Nuriko. "I was here. I should've done something sooner, but I had no idea...that...he..." The violet-haired man moved to his side and put a consoling hand on

his friend's shoulder. "It's not your fault either, Chichiri. Stop blaming yourself for everything...we've got to focus on getting Miaka back now." "Yeah, we're gonna get that *@(#*#(\$)!in' sonofabitch Nakago and make him pay. I *KNEW* he was behind alla this somehow!" "He isn't." Chichiri sighed again. "He's just a pawn in this whole game. We're pawns." "Who's in charge?" Tasuki grumbled, flopping down beside his best friend. "I'm gonna find out who's *#!&in' in charge o' this and then they're gonna be sorry..." "It's not Yogiri, is it Chichiri..." Nuriko looked at the monk with a degree of certainty. "That would be too obvious." The man nodded. "You're right, Nuriko. There's something more to both him and this whole game that they're playing. We are being manipulated, but not directly...there are a few very important pieces and some not-so-important pieces, and we're being used to gather the very important ones." "Whaddaya mean we ain't important?!" Tasuki fumed. "I mean, at this point in time, we are not essential to the players of this game. Someone else is moving the pieces, Tasuki. It is not us. We are being moved, and we are being gathered. Our hour has not shown itself yet." "Yeah, whatever." The bandit tapped his tessen idly against the floor, and Nuriko seated himself beside Chichiri. "We have to be ready." "Yes we do." The monk rose to his feet, clasping his staff. "I know where Miaka is. We have to strike now, and I am not sure we can do that alone." "But Mitsukake hasn't arrived yet, and Chiriko is going to stay at the other temple, right?" The violet-haired seishi sighed. "There is no way we can possibly win with just the three of us. We're going to need at least one more to stand alongside us." Chichiri cursed. "I forgot to ask Chiriko about Hotohori! I can't believe that. It was the whole reason we sought him out." Nuriko sighed heavily. "It can't be helped. Everything that happened..." "No. I should've asked. I seem to only make mistakes lately, ones that have cost us greatly. I am less of an asset and more of a liability to you, Nuriko..." The monk looked down at the floor, but he returned his gaze to his friend's face as the hand on his shoulder squeezed. "Don't talk like that." Nuriko rose and went to the chest, then drew out the three crystals of Hotohori. "Nobody is a liability. We all need to be there for Miaka. We all have to fight to save her, and to come out triumphant." He lifted up the three crystals, and they somehow stayed in the air where he had put them. They began to glow before him, and the man once again smiled, reaching out as they began to spin around. The great symbol of the emperor of Konan flashed in the air, and suddenly he lay before them. Nuriko blushed but did not avert his eyes from the naked man, instead rushing to him and embracing him. He looked around to the others and motioned to them. Tasuki got the message and brought a robe for the man, which Nuriko helped him on with. Hotohori rubbed his forehead slowly. "Ohhh...what...what has happened...?" "Just be calm, my lord Hotohori..." Nuriko smiled down at his most beloved emperor. "You're...you're awake." "I wasn't aware...that I was asleep." He held his head and sighed. "I...need to rest." "Of course." Nuriko helped him to his feet and went off, looking back to the others with reassuring eyes. They nodded, watching their friend go. After the two men were out of sight, Tasuki turned to Chichiri. "How much does he know?" "I don't know." The monk rose to his feet and put his kasa on, then collected his staff from where it was leaning on the wall. "I don't know how I will be able to tell him...about...his family if he does not know." "I guess we could ask Nuriko t'do dat." Tasuki sat, holding his feet. "He knows 'im better. Gets along better." "That wouldn't be fair to Nuriko, you know that." Chichiri made for the door and looked outside. "Tasuki...do you think something has happened to Mitsukake?" "I dunno. He seems t'be a capable guy." The bandit joined his friend at

the door. "I don't think he'd let himself get hurt." "It's been over a day...well over enough time for him to get here again." The monk solemnly stared out at the courtyard. "I am worried about him...but we cannot wait any longer. You, Nuriko, and I must go on, and then when Hotohori recovers...I suppose he will be able to help us if we are still alive." "'Chiri!" "We've made the choice, Tasuki. Now we must go through with it in full." He began to walk towards Hotohori's chambers and the redhead followed closely. "There is no other alternative. If the flow of destiny is on our side...then we will win. If not...then others will learn from our mistakes...no da." Tasuki looked on, somewhat worried, somewhat fearful...but he grasped his tessen tightly, ready for the inevitable fight ahead.

Soi followed every step they took...the three other seishi, ahead of her, heading towards what she knew would be her eventual goal as well. It drove her on, propelled her, and it had been what had brought her back from the dead, she was certain. No matter what the others had told her...her heart knew the truth. She silently leaped through the foliage, careful not to disturb the branches and leaves too much, making absolutely sure that the three were at an adequate distance not to detect her presence. Her tunic was little protection from the slashing branches, and by the time they had escaped from the grove's sanctuary, her hands and neck were covered in little scratches. Her breaths were coming in gasps now as she struggled to keep up. The three were in great shape and running at almost top speed, and with her attempts at stealth, it made it all the more difficult to get close to them. She decided to simply hurry along at her own top speed and take the chance that she might be caught...at this point, it did not matter as much as finding herself in front of him...in front of the man who had haunted her mind endlessly...Nakago. She had to reach Nakago. That was the only thing that would fulfill her, the only thing that would make her existence complete. And she would never allow him to be defeated again.

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Eleven-

The strange temple in the middle of the plains faded in and out of view, and the only thing that made them sure it was truly there was Chichiri's unwavering insistence that it was so. He led the other three toward it, grasping his staff like a beacon of light in the windy twilight that had fallen as they approached. Behind them, a slim figure of a woman ran on, following their movements closely. She moved with a purpose, with something inside her compelling her to further movement. Her eyes grew slim as she peered forth, seeing through the temple at once and then its sturdy walls once more. She questioned how they could have possibly detected it, but then she remembered their inimitable sense of location and their various divination tools. The other three were at the door, and the monk stepped forward and rapped his staff on the huge twin portals before him, which opened obediently. Not willing to let his fear take him over, Tasuki put a foot forth to begin his stride inside, but he was unable to finish that step and simply shrunk back from the door. Nuriko put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, and rather than brush it off, the bandit actually smiled at him and nodded, taking in a deep breath and heading in with his friend. As soon as the three were well inside, out of sight, Soi dashed forward and through the steadily-closing portal, and as they slammed shut, denying any other ingress, she was already inside, separating herself from the other three now that she was there...she would let her heart guide her from

then on.

Nakago licked Yogiri's neck and moved down from there, and the other man moaned in intense pleasure. The light in the first man's eyes was apparent, but Miaka, looking on at the whole scene, knew that there was something more in the villain's eyes, that he had a way of manipulation that was so subtle, that so easily went to the heart of whomever he desired, that by the time they realized it, it was invariably too late. She looked down, away from the scene, and then back to Nakago, who was in the middle of something else, apparently. How could he bear to be humiliated in such a way? His eyes were not on Yogiri, for sure, and she instinctively felt that Yogiri could never have engineered any sort of manipulative spells to bind the other man to him. She would have to stay around and figure out what was going on. When she looked away and back again, Nakago had disappeared and Yogiri was tying a robe around his body with a smile. "Miaka...do you approve? I had hoped you would feel vindicated with your old foe in such a...subservient position. Does it feel good?" "That's not what it was about." She sighed and sat back. "I don't think that way." "Don't you?" He sneered at her. "You were so keen on defeating someone you claimed to care for. She was your best friend, Miaka. How did it feel? Did it feel good to have victory over her? Did you crush her in your world?" "Stop it!" Miaka grabbed her head and looked down. "Stop it. That's not the way it happened. It didn't happen that way. You're twisting the events to your own perception, trying to provoke me." "But Miaka...even I know...we're just in a book. All of this is words. You can be erased...*SO* easily..." He laughed, and she stared up at him. "How do you know about the book?" He kicked her in the stomach, and she doubled over in agony. "Don't underestimate me, you pathetic scum. Nothing you can do will ever free you from my shadow, you know that. After I'm finished with you, you'll be discarded, just like you've discarded all those you love in this place." "Maybe...maybe every world is...words from another..." She looked up at him, still coughing and struggling for breath. "I left them in their own world...where they live...the world they know. It's not my world. They're not of my world. It would be wrong for me to... to selfishly make them stay. No matter how I felt about them. What was that old saying...? 'If you love something, set it free'...? I've done that. I can't do anything else..." Yogiri spun around and slammed the hilt of a katana into the woman's head, and she slumped to the ground, her forehead bleeding, cut and bruised. "You can. You can die, and when you do, my power will be absolute."

Soi sighed, leaning against the wall, wiping her sweat-covered forehead. "Nakago...my master...where are you?" She gasped as the wall behind her vanished, and she fell back into the receptive arms of another and was pressed against a bare male chest. The door returned into place and the darkness pressed upon her. "I'm right here...Soi." She gazed around and put her head on the chest, holding the man close to her. "Oh master Nakago...I knew you were here. I knew you would come." "Not just yet..." He caressed her chin, the dim light filtering in from the cracks that led to the corridor. "Not just now. It isn't safe for you here. You know that. Get out." "I can't. I've been brought back to serve you. I know that we were meant to meet again." "Soi...I'm sorry." He took in a deep breath and sighed heavily. "Perhaps destiny has made a mistake." "It hasn't! I know it!" She pounded her fists on his chest. "Let me show you that I can serve you again! Let me show you!" "No. I can't allow you to do that." He reached out and, with a quick chop of his hand to her neck, she fell unconscious. He picked up her unconscious form and sighed

again, feeling that the situation was all too familiar. He headed down the passage as his mind reached back to the past and expanded to any possible destiny, the wheels in his mind churning out intricate plans for anything that might happen.

Tasuki yelled again. "LEKKA SHIEN!" The flame arrows shot out to Yogiri, who dodged once more. "I've told you, my place of power makes me invincible. It was foolish of you to come here." He flicked his wrist, and instantly his dagger was in his hand. "I won't be defeated this easily." "You aren't behind this, so stop trying to make us believe you are." "What are you talking about, monk?" Yogiri's voice wavered with anger, but Chichiri knew that it was partially desperation mixed with fear. The monk dodged a blast of energy that hurled into the ground and blew tile everywhere around the room. "I'm speaking of the master of this game, the one that is using you. You are being used, and you know it. Why do you allow yourself to be a pawn in this game? Can you not take control of even your own body?" "Shut up!!!" This time the bolt connected, and Chichiri felt something snap inside him as he flew across the floor and into a wall. A tear rolled down his cheek, a mixture of pain and sadness of what had gone before, and the knowledge that, in his view, he had failed his priestess, the one he had sworn that he would serve and protect. Tasuki screamed out in rage. "'CHIRI!!!!" At once, the bandit leaped through the air, slashing into the villain's chest with his tessen. Yogiri slammed back into his own altar, his tunic open and destroyed. Nuriko ran into the room at last, surveying the damage, and went over to Chichiri. "Chichiri! Are you all right...?" The monk nodded, holding his side and groaning slightly. His fellow seishi glared over at his fallen foe, and went over to Tasuki, looking to his friend. "He's defeated...and he knows it." "Maybe he is, but I don't care, he's gonna pay...!" The bandit stopped as Nuriko put a restraining arm in front of his chest. "We've done enough, Tasuki. I don't think he's responsible for his actions truly...he's just being used, and we'll be used by the same power if we kill him." A blast seared in between them, sending the two to opposite sides of the room. "DON'T EVER PITY ME!!!" Yogiri stood shakily, blood soaking through his slashed tunic. "I would rather die!!!" "You will die if you don't let us help you!" Nuriko called out, his fists clenched. "I know we were set against each other, but this is not your fault...this is not your battle! Simply surrender and let us help you..." Another explosion blew Nuriko into the far wall, and the seishi crumpled to the floor in a moaning heap. Tasuki leaped up, but he met the same fate, slamming into the opposite wall from Nuriko with a yell. "Do not pity me." Yogiri stumbled forward two steps, then his eyes flashes with a dark power. "Or you will die...you all must die, now..." He raised his hands and a huge explosion blasted from the altar behind him, then electricity crackled from his fingertips. "You all must die by my hand..." His eyes softened somewhat, and a single tear rolled down his cheek. "...forgive me."

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Twelve-

As Yogiri lifted his energy-encircled hands over the bodies of the unconscious Suzaku seishi, his eyes softened for an instant and a single tear rolled down his cheek. "Forgive me...please..." As he prepared to unleash his full power, a silver disc flashed past his right arm, slashing into the sleeve and knocking him off balance for an instant, totally dispelling the power that he had been gathering. "Who dares...?" "We dare." The voice belonged to Akira, who stepped

into the room, wearing his usual fancy garb. He held another z-shaped blade in his hand, dislike in its design. "You've done quite enough, I think, Yogiri, that endangers all the realms in this beautiful country." Behind him was a whole group, who consisted of the Byakko seishi in their full assemblage, but Akira stepped calmly aside to allow two others to enter the room. The first was Hotohori, in his usual royal attire, carrying his best sword, and behind him was the healer of his court, Mitsukake. "I, the emperor of Konan, challenge you to this fight. One on one, to the death!" Hotohori pointed the tip of his blade at Yogiri, who frowned, then grasped his temples. "What trickery is this...?" "H...Hotohori..." Nuriko pushed himself up from the floor and held his throbbing head. "Don't..." The emperor frowned. "I cannot forgive someone responsible for the death of my wife and child..." He added under his breath, "Forgive me...Nuriko." Mitsukake looked up at those words. "Your wife...and...?" "I know that you have all wrestled with whether you would tell me or not, but...I know that she is dead. And my child as well. You used their energy to fuel your puppet's formation. I will not forgive or allow it!" Nuriko slumped to the floor again, watching through tears at the actions of his ruler. Something had given rise to a great pity in his heart, something that he could not grasp concretely, but he rose shakily to his feet and stumbled across the floor. "Hotohori...please...spare him...he's not...responsible..." The emperor's eyes flitted over to the violet-haired seishi and he fought a great inner struggle, his blade pointed directly at his foe and his heart set against the man. At last, his heart won again and he lowered his blade, running over to Nuriko to support him. "Nuriko...please...conserve your strength...I don't think I can bear to lose you again." At once, he was surprised at his own words and also at his sentiment. "Please...this way..." He helped Nuriko to sit on the floor by Tasuki, who was already attempting to get to his feet as well. Hotohori calmed the two and looked up at Yogiri, noticing that Chichiri was already being tended to by Mitsukake. The Byakko seishi and priest did nothing at this point, leaving the entire decision to Hotohori. "I will fight you until this puppet's strings are cut." He once again drew his sword and tensed his muscles, his own symbol flashing for an instant. "I will not let you take any more that are dear to me, in this world or any other!" Yogiri drew his hand back and let out a volley of blasts, which Hotohori was hard-pressed to dodge but ended up unscathed. He slashed at the other man, who leaped back at his superhuman speed, and at once the emperor found a dagger at his throat. Closing his eyes, he found himself torn between the afterlife and his duty to his departed wife and child, and he opened his eyes again and somehow saw them in the eyes of his foe. He knew that they had been destroyed...quickly, he had found...and reformed in such a travesty of life and humanity...but something in his heart cried for him to stay his hand and spare this man rather than strike his weapon away and slay him. Hotohori nodded. "I will surrender." Akira moved forward. "We of Byakko will not accept that." The priest flung another of the silver discs at Yogiri, who was hit by it and fell back, the dagger falling away, still barely attached by the cord at its hilt. Blood was now soaking the man's tunic and the emperor got to his feet. "What were you doing?" He glared at the strange priest with his eyes on fire. "I had surrendered to him. He was unready. You have struck in a cowardly way..." "When your wife and child were slain, I'm sure it was done very valiantly, or shall I attempt to show you that?" Hotohori opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He closed it again and stepped back, his arms at his side. "We must unmask his master." Akira nodded and motioned to his seishi, who were at his side in an instant. The

throng moved into the inner rooms behind the altar, and immediately Hotohori rushed to the back of the room, noticing the battered woman lying in a small pool of blood there. "MIAKA!!!" He knelt by her and cradled her in his arms, attempting to stop the flow of blood that she coughed up intermittently, his tears flowing freely at the life that he knew he could have saved, that he could yet save if it was not too late...he called out in his loudest voice. "Mitsukake! You must come in here! If you don't, there is no hope...please...!" The healer rushed in, examining Miaka, and he sighed. "Her injuries are extensive. I don't know if even I can help...but I will try." Mitsukake concentrated and his symbol began to shine, glowing through the shadows that seemed to stick to everything in the room. At that moment, Miaka's face became clearer and less strained, and she smiled briefly, coughing only one last time before she opened her eyes again. "Mitsukake..." She raised a hand, weakly. "It's so good...to see you well again." She looked up at the face she knew she would find owning the arms that cradled her. "Lord Hotohori...you too..." The emperor smiled down at her and at his healer as well. "You have done very well, Mitsukake. Thank you." The man nodded and returned to the other room, eager to tend to the original three attackers, while Hotohori made Miaka comfortable as much as he could. He looked up at the Byakko seishi and their leader as he sat there, comforting his own priestess and noting how well they seemed to get along and how perfectly they mixed. At times, he was sure, they must bicker like the Suzaku seishi did, but he also knew that when a crucial moment demanded seriousness, they could all come together and act as one. Akira was steering them as well as he could, and he persuaded all of them to cover a small area completely with their survey to find any objects of magickal significance. Hotohori still felt something inside, though, and he wanted to say something, but he found himself unable to speak. Suddenly a dark energy blast blew the wall away to the other room, and Yogiri once more stood before them, his body torn and bruised with blood soaking his garments and his limbs. His eyes were blank... almost as if he was dead inside. He stumbled forward, squinting at Hotohori and raising his hand. "You have made...an unfortunate choice." As the emperor attempted to move Miaka, he was struck down and fell to the floor. Yogiri hovered now, closer to his foe, and flicked his dagger to hand at once, preparing to strike; he was never able to, however, as Amefuri leaped forward, and at his touch the dagger blew apart, stunning Yogiri momentarily, but not long enough. The villain grabbed the seishi's wrist and forced his arm behind his back and the seishi to the ground, then Yogiri lifted his energy-charged hand in a bolt to kill... "AMEFURI!!!" Akira's voice rang out from across the room, and his final disc slashed by Yogiri, barely scuffing his boots. At that, the priest rushed forward, and the villain merely laughed. "I can kill two in one blow...thank you, for making it possible to d..." His voice came to an abrupt halt as Yogiri stumbled forward, and behind him was revealed the presence of Nakago, dressed in striking clothing as always and with those cool eyes that reflected only what he wished. He looked up as Amefuri leaped back to protect his priest, but Nakago shook his head. "This is not my fight. I simply made it so that I would stay alive this long." He headed back into the shadows. "My debt is paid now. I bid you farewell." They watched him until they could no more discern his shape, and at that point they knew he was gone from the room and most likely from the temple altogether. Their attention turned to Yogiri, who lay unmoving and silent in the middle of the room. He was not dead, they knew that much, but to be so still...it was not normal after a simple battle...however, this man was far from normal. Suddenly, spears of light flashed out and jutted

in a circle around Yogiri's body, and then the energy flowed into him. Another form, one made up of light entirely, rose from the ground, leaving the fleshy form to lie there. The light body began to change, sprouting huge wings and two extra arms, and it began to solidify and look out at the others, who knew that this must be the true nature of the great dark spirit who had been manipulating behind the scenes. "Who are you?" Akira held Amefuri's arm protectively, almost possessively. "What is your purpose?" Chichiri's voice came from the hole in the wall, where he was standing, leaning against what remained of the stones. "It is...the voice of disaster...its purpose is to bring oblivion. I had feared that it would be the force responsible for all of this, but...I hoped I was wrong..." Akira glared at it. "It will not bring oblivion, I swear by the great name of Byakko!"

FUSHIGI YUUGI Night Wings -Part Thirteen-

The lightform stood there, solidifying, its wings spread out across the expanse of the room, its four arms moving slowly, in a weird dance of unknown purpose. Chichiri stumbled into the room. "The power of Byakko is not enough to stop it...even our unified powers may not be enough..." Miaka stood from where she had been lying and stumbled past the circle of light around Yogiri's form, then put her hand on Akira's shoulder. "We can stop it, Chichiri...if Byakko and Suzaku's power works together." She looked up at him, and the monk stared out towards the rapidly-forming hand of destruction that hovered in the middle of the room. "Two Gods can stop this!" Akira nodded. "I will agree...if we are able, that is, to do this properly." Miaka gestured to the room. "This is a temple...I can think of no better place. We might not have the right words, but an impassioned appeal would do the trick. I'm sure of it." She glanced over at the figure. "We have to hurry." The priest nodded and produced a small stone from his coat, then began to write strange designs in a circle on the floor. When it was done, he sat in it and motioned for Miaka to join him, which she did. He closed his eyes and began to concentrate, taking her hands in his...and Chichiri turned his attention to them as their auras began to emerge, one fiery scarlet, tinged with blazing orange, the other a cool white with an almost icy tip to it. They intertwined and spiralled around in the circle, and at last it began to shimmer into shape, the forms of the two great gods beginning to form in a misty, vague manner, as if at the edge of one's sight. Bolts began to fly from the simultaneously angelic and demonic figure, striking dangerously close to the two sacred ones, but at that moment, Amefuri stood, closing his eyes and preparing himself so that, if anyone should be hit, it would be him, instead of his beloved priest who was trying to save them all. He was not alone. Another of the Byakko seishi had returned, the girl Toroki, who drew her sword and stood guardlike on the opposite side of the circle. Chichiri, inspired, joined them, and soon all the other Byakko seishi were there as well. Nuriko stumbled in, Tasuki supporting him, and Mitsukake behind the other two. Hotohori stirred and got up, standing with the others, and the circle began to shine as brightly as the bringer of oblivion...then it became even brighter. Miaka looked up, and suddenly, before her eyes, Tamahome was there, and he reached out his hand to her. She took it, and at once, the bright fire of Suzaku's phoenix blazed through her heart. Akira smiled and took a deep breath in...and when he released it, the voice became the fierce roar of the white tiger Byakko. The two stood, still intertwined in their auras, and pointed their joined hands at the creature that intended their destruction. As one, the seishi turned to see, and as one, the two

Gods moved to strike against the threat. The form there looked up fatalistically and made no move to stop them...the two deities began to waver. Akira and Miaka redoubled their attacks, the godforms stronger and more solid, and at last they broke through the mystical defense of their foe. With something like a reverse scream, the creature fell into itself, collapsing into the light it had brought and into the darkness it wished to bring. The circle of light spears flickered and faded around Yogiri, and he turned over, staring up at the seishi and their leaders. His eyes filled with tears, not knowing what else to do, and he pulled himself to his feet, stumbling over to them. The two Gods disappeared and the auras faded back into their respective owners, and the seishi all relaxed and looked out at the other man, who was shaking from his sobs, wracked by agony and guilt. Nuriko went out to him and attempted to console him, and Yogiri collapsed onto his breast and began to cry uncontrollably, gasping for breath as the tears ran freely down his face. Miaka looked out and then back at Akira, who nodded to her. A slight smile flashed on her face, and then she looked back out, more than a little concerned for Yogiri.

The Suzaku seishi and Byakko seishi all gathered in the huge courtyard of the temple in Sairou, with all the joyful festivities of a true victory celebration. They had much to be thankful for, and all present were indeed grateful that they had been able to survive and emerge with a successful outcome. The feast came and went, and as the warm afternoon stretched on into evening, they all sat outside, sipping their drinks and talking endlessly about various subjects. "I'm still not entirely sure about that palace, Chichiri." Miaka looked over at the monk, who was now bandaged up. "It comes into existence with the stones?" Chiriko's new form looked over at Miaka. "Only if the time is right and everything is in place...and this time, that great oblivion wanted to make sure they were, so he engineered a body...but the body was imperfect for his goals. There was a conscience in the body that fought for superiority, that continually sought to stop the force of oblivion itself...and that was the human part of Yogiri. When it had no more use for him, it simply used his form to make another." Chichiri nodded. "That's exactly what I was going to say." He smiled at Chiriko, who blushed. "Sorry Chichiri, sir...I didn't mean to answer for you..." The monk waved a dismissive hand and smiled, shaking his head. "I'd rather stay silent anyway...these ribs feel like they've been run over by a horse, no da." He chuckled lightly and carefully. "Where did Yogiri go...did anyone see in the confusion with the palace fading out like that?" Miaka took another drink from her cup and looked around at the others. "I saw him walking away." Nuriko, reclining luxuriously, looked up at his priestess. "I think he was going to be alone for a while. I know why, I think, too..." Hotohori sighed and squeezed Nuriko's shoulder as he got up and went towards the temple. "Excuse me...I'll just get some more to drink and be right back." Akira rose, and the others looked after them as they both went into the temple. Miaka looked at the Byakko seishi. "It's good to finally meet all of you...I never thought I'd be able to do that..."

Akira sat by Hotohori in front of the fire and gently touched the other man's shoulder. "I do apologise for the temple...I didn't mean to hurt you like I did." Hotohori shrugged. "It was in battle...I know you did not mean it." "That's very magnanimous of you." Akira giggled slightly, then covered his mouth. "Sorry again...shall I leave you or were you really wanting more to drink?" The emperor laughed. "I will get another drink and then join you directly. Thank

you." The priest nodded and stood, making his way out to the rest of the guests, and Hotohori sat staring into the fire, his thoughts of Suzaku, Nuriko, and the past that never was.

Nakago stood with Soi, overlooking Kotou country, taking in the beautiful, familiar view with more than nostalgia. She reclined in his embrace and her heart was at last happy, her soul jubilant that her goal was achieved in such short time from her awakening. She feared for him, she lived for him, and she longed for him, and now she would be able to express that for the rest of her life. He smiled at her, allowing himself a little bit of indulgence. His hair blew in the wind and his mind wandered. Perhaps if he could give this one woman a small amount of happiness, then that would give him back a reason to live. If he could restore her to the way she was and then lift her to the way she desired, then he saw inside himself the path to his own satisfaction. He wondered if he loved her...he was not entirely sure if he was capable of love. However, she had shown loyalty, trust, courage... if anyone was right for him, she would be among the foremost in that list. He took a deep breath and let out a contented sigh. Not to tie him down or restrict him...but he would give it at least a fair chance. He had seen enough of fighting and struggle, enough blood and destruction for now. It was time for him to retire from that life and allow himself the luxury of living for the sake of life.

The lanterns blazed with light as the night was upon the shrine of Byakko and the group assembled there still enjoyed the company of each other greatly, laughing and talking, and discussing serious issues as well, the conversation meandering calmly back and forth between the two. "I might be here a long time." Miaka sat next to Hotohori and the recovered Tamahome, who had come all the way from Konan with the help of Chichiri. "I don't know...but if I am, then I hope we can work together again, Akira...maybe this is the beginning of a new chapter in our book, so to speak." She chuckled. "Maybe if we work together in this, we can make it less of a battle and more of a romance." Tamahome put his hand on Miaka's and smiled. "I would have no objections to that." Akira smiled, reclining in the embrace of his own dear Amefuri. "Nor I...in fact, I hope for that every day." The seishi holding him blushed but smiled and contentedly stroked the priest's hair. Hotohori stood, looking around. "I hate to break such a touching scene, but my eyelids will hardly stay open. I fear I must retire for the night." Akira nodded, smiling. "Shall I show you to your room...?" Hotohori shook his head. "No...thank you. I will need to stop along the way in any case." He set off, then Nuriko rose and winked at them, running along after his emperor. The group thinned steadily, until at last the only ones left were Miaka and Tamahome, and Akira and Amefuri. They began to talk, and it was not a dialogue of a struggle or an unending battle. This time it was words of love.

End
file.